

**MORAL PEDAGOGY AND THE RURAL DISADVANTAGED STUDENT:
SUBSIDIZING DRAMA IN KANKE LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF PLATEAU
STATE, NIGERIA.**

Iheanacho C. IWEHA PhD
Department of Theatre Arts
Federal University of Education, Zaria
Iheanachoiweha@gmail.com
iheanachoiweha@gmail.com

Abstract

This study investigated the impact of subsidized drama presentations as a tool for moral pedagogy among rural, socio-economically disadvantaged teenagers within Kanke Local Government Area (LGA) of Plateau State, Nigeria. Utilizing a qualitative case study design, the research explored a pro-bono delivery model of educational theatre and evaluated how exposure to ethically themed drama influences perceived moral reasoning and pro-social awareness among students. While the outreach performances reached an overall audience of 3,824 students across twelve secondary schools, a focal sample of 300 senior secondary students and their teachers participated in semi-structured interviews and field discussions. The Theatre-in-Education drama unit presented a repertoire focused on honesty, integrity, empathy, and civic responsibility. Qualitative data gathered via interviews, field observations, and post-performance focus group discussions were analysed thematically. The findings indicated a notable improvement in students' moral awareness, value clarification, and self-reported pro-social intentions. The study concludes that subsidized drama presentations serve as an engaging, accessible, and culturally resonant pedagogical tool for fostering character development in underserved rural settings. Recommendations include formal policy integration of educational drama into rural school curricula and enhanced corporate and institutional funding for arts-based interventions.

Keywords: Moral pedagogy, Drama education, Rural poverty, Youth development, Kanke Local Government Area.

Introduction

Poverty in Nigeria, particularly in rural environments, remains a multifaceted phenomenon characterized by structural deficits in educational infrastructure, healthcare, and economic mobility (Ogunyemi & Okechukwu, 2021). Rural, socio-economically disadvantaged school-aged teenagers face unique vulnerabilities, rendering them susceptible to societal challenges such as crime, academic malpractice, and the erosion of traditional community values (Adewale & Babalola, 2020). In these resource-constrained environments, robust moral education is imperative—not only to encourage academic persistence but to cultivate the ethical fortitude necessary to navigate complex socio-economic realities. Traditional moral pedagogy often relies on passive, rote classroom instruction, necessitating a shift toward innovative, participatory methodologies that deeply instil virtues, ethical reasoning, and civic responsibility.

Educational drama possesses inherent qualities that make it uniquely suited for active moral pedagogy. Its immersive, experiential, and collaborative nature enables the exploration of complex ethical dilemmas within a safe, relatable framework (Akaenyi, 2024; Nwokedi & Okoro, 2019). Through character embodiment and narrative reflection, students learn to empathize with diverse perspectives, critically analyse the systemic consequences of personal actions, and mentally rehearse ethical responses to real-world challenges. This active involvement contrasts sharply with didactic approaches, fostering a deeper internalization of principles. For youth

residing in rural areas where formal educational resources are scarce, interactive drama offers a dynamic alternative for character formation and values clarification.

Kanke Local Government Area (LGA) in Plateau State, Nigeria, typifies the structural challenges faced by peripheral agrarian communities. Characterized by limited infrastructural development, schools in this region frequently contend with underfunding and a standardized curriculum that may not fully address the localized socio-moral pressures encountered by youth (Dung & Bot, 2022). This study posits that subsidizing educational drama presentations can bypass institutional resource constraints, serving as a potent vehicle for moral pedagogy and encouraging positive behavioural reflections. Despite this potential, there remains a lack of empirical documentation regarding arts-based moral interventions within rural Nigerian settings.

This qualitative study aims to address this gap by exploring the perceived efficacy of zero-cost, ethically themed drama presentations in shaping the moral reasoning and pro-social awareness of secondary school students in Kanke LGA. Specifically, the study addresses the following research questions:

1. What changes in moral reasoning do secondary school students in Kanke LGA report after exposure to subsidized drama presentations?
2. What is the level of acceptance of the subsidized drama presentations among the target students?
3. To what extent do school management teams call for the continuous subsidization of morally themed educational drama?
4. What structural factors influence the sustainability of subsidized drama interventions in rural secondary schools?

The significance of this study lies in its capacity to inform educational policy regarding creative interventions in underserved regions. Demonstrating the pedagogical utility of educational theatre can encourage government agencies, non-governmental organizations, and institutional bodies to invest in and integrate drama into formal learning frameworks. Ultimately, cultivating a morally conscious youth population is vital for sustainable community development and social equity within developing contexts like Nigeria.

Literature Review

The Theoretical Framework of Moral Pedagogy

Moral pedagogy addresses systematic educational efforts to develop ethical character, cognitive moral judgment, and prosocial behaviour (Adilovna, 2026; Kohlberg, 1984; Yuana & Sebayang, 2026). While traditional models emphasize didactic moral instruction, contemporary developmental theories emphasize experiential, interactive environments where learners actively construct their moral frameworks (Grageda et al., 2022; Paulus, 2020). Within the African context, moral pedagogy is traditionally embedded in communal values, collective responsibility, and integrity (Oyelami & Lawal, 2018). These values are historically transmitted via oral traditions, proverbs, and communal performance rituals, highlighting the theatricality inherent in traditional African moral socialization (Uche & Nweke, 2021).

Drama in Education (DiE) and Ethical Development

Drama in Education (DiE) utilizes theatrical techniques and processes to achieve developmental and learning objectives beyond public performance (Bolton, 1992). It serves as an active pedagogical tool facilitating learning through lived experience, structured reflection, and creative expression. Literature highlights several core dimensions where drama influences moral development:

- i. **Empathy and Perspective-Taking:** By stepping into the roles of diverse characters, participants develop the capacity to comprehend the emotional realities of others, which is foundational to mature moral reasoning (Okafor & Okoroafor, 2017).
- ii. **Critical Thinking and Problem-Solving:** Drama presents open-ended narrative dilemmas that require participants to analyse behavioural consequences and negotiate ethical solutions (Ibrahim & Musa, 2020).
- iii. **Values Clarification and Internalization:** Dramatizing themes of honesty, justice, and self-control allows students to engage with virtues both emotionally and intellectually, promoting authentic internalization over simple memorization (Adeyemi & Olaniyan, 2018).
- iv. **Pro-social Intentions:** Practicing cooperation and conflict resolution within a simulated space lowers the barrier to real-world behavioural adoption (Eze & Chukwuma, 2019).

Nigerian scholarship consistently affirms the communicative utility of educational theatre. Nwokedi and Okoro (2019) emphasize the power of performance in disseminating complex civic and social messages. Similarly, Adeyemi and Olaniyan (2018) note the positive outcomes of integrating creative drama into primary education in Southwest Nigeria, validating the expansion of these methods to secondary students in other underserved geopolitical zones.

Rural Poverty and Moral Vulnerabilities in Nigeria

Rural poverty in Nigeria severely restricts student access to holistic educational opportunities, reinforcing cycles of socioeconomic disadvantage (Adewale & Babalola, 2020). Beyond economic scarcity, rural youth often navigate environments with limited informational exposure and shifting traditional community structures due to economic pressures (Ogunyemi & Okechukwu, 2021). Consequently, youth face heightened exposure to academic dishonesty, substance abuse, and early school departure to meet immediate survival needs.

Adewale and Babalola (2020) observed that rural economic deprivation directly compromises the institutional capacity to deliver quality moral and civic guidance. Furthermore, Ojo & Fajemirokun (2023) observed that structured cultural and community-based interventions mitigate the vulnerability of rural youths by strengthening local resilience factors. These dynamics underscore the necessity of interventions that complement basic academic instruction by addressing character development.

Subsidization as an Equity Strategy in Educational Theatre

Subsidizing educational performances directly addresses the financial and logistical barriers that prevent rural schools from accessing enriched artistic programming. Most institutions in Kanke LGA lack the budgetary allocations or internal theatrical specialization required to maintain functional drama programs (Dung & Bot, 2022). External funding and volunteer infrastructure bridge this equity gap, ensuring high-quality pedagogical interventions reach students irrespective of socio-economic status.

This model aligns with inclusive learning frameworks. Delivering performances directly to rural school grounds circumvents problems regarding student transportation, ticket costs, and institutional alienation. Engaging regional church ensembles, para-church troupes, or university theatre outreach teams builds local creative capacity and ensures the performance material remains culturally relevant and linguistically accessible (Usman & Adebayo, 2022). While existing literature provides a strong theoretical baseline for educational drama, qualitative accounts focusing on subsidized outreach models in peripheral Nigerian schools remain limited. This study contributes empirical field insights to address this gap.

Methodology

Research Design

This study adopted a qualitative case study design utilizing multi-method field data collection, including semi-structured interviews, participant observations, and post-performance focus group discussions (FGDs). This qualitative approach was selected to capture the nuanced subjective reflections of students and educators within the brief time frames permitted by participating schools. Performances were designed to fit within standard forty (40)-minute class instructional periods, requiring immediate, real-time field data gathering.

Target Population and Sample Selection

The overarching target population comprised all secondary school students present during the field outreach across twelve selected schools in Kanke LGA, Plateau State, resulting in an aggregate audience of 3,824 students.

From this larger population, a focal sample of 300 Senior Secondary School (SSS 1–3) students was purposively selected for in-depth interviewing. The sample was balanced across the 12 institutions, including 11 co-educational public schools and 1 all-female institution. The selection criteria for this interview cohort were:

1. Active attendance and engagement during the live drama outreach.
2. Cognitive maturity appropriate for discussing ethical dilemmas, as senior secondary students navigate active periods of moral consolidation (Kohlberg, 1984).
3. Express voluntary willingness to participate in post-show evaluations.

Data Collection Instruments

Data collection relied on two main qualitative tools:

1. Semi-Structured Interviews: Formulated to capture qualitative responses regarding thematic interpretation, narrative comprehension, and self-reported changes in ethical outlook. Instrument validity was verified by two senior educational theatre specialists from Nigerian university theatre arts departments.
2. Structured Participant Observation: Non-acting team members-maintained field logs documenting behavioural indicators during performances. Tracked metrics included student attentiveness, instances of distraction or noise, real-time emotional resonance (laughter, silence), and the non-verbal engagement of attending staff.

The Subsidized Drama Intervention

The intervention comprised four short plays and monologues (8–10 minutes each), with a minimum of two pieces performed per school over a designated three-day field schedule. The presentations were written and performed by the Theatremass drama unit—a professional volunteer troupe consisting of trained community actors and adolescent educators—under the guidance of a drama-in-education specialist from the Federal University of Education, Zaria. The project was completely subsidized by the organizing ministry, requiring no financial contribution from the students, staff, or local school authorities. Promotional support and school scheduling were coordinated in partnership with local school principals and the Ministry of Education representative offices in Kanke. The performance repertoire targeted explicit moral pressures identified within the regional youth demographic:

Table 1: Repertoire Themes, Pedagogical Lessons, and Performance Titles

S/N	Repertoire Theme	Pedagogical Lesson	Title of Play/Monologue
1	Honesty and Integrity	Rejection of academic dishonesty and systemic corruption	<i>Mr. Malpractice</i>
2	Punctuality	Personal accountability and time Management	<i>Lati Again</i>
3	Personal Responsibility	Moral character and personal boundary setting	<i>By This Time Tomorrow</i>
4	Social Relationships	Resisting negative peer influence and premature sexualization	<i>Time Table</i>
5	Self-Control & Contentment	Substance abuse prevention and institutional compliance	<i>Five Credits Away</i>

Source: *Theatremass Fieldwork*, 2025.

Each production concluded with a five-minute interactive debriefing session led by a troupe facilitator, allowing students to unpack the narrative choices of characters, voice personal impressions, and discuss ethical alternatives in the presence of their classroom instructors.

Data Collection Procedure & Ethical Protocols

Institutional approval was obtained from the Plateau State Ministry of Education alongside explicit consent from participating school principals. Because the intervention was integrated into the public assembly and standard class periods, individual written parental consent was complemented by *in loco parentis* authorization from school administrators, alongside voluntary verbal assent from the interviewed senior students. Complete anonymity and confidentiality regarding personal statements were maintained throughout the study.

Data gathering followed a three-tiered sequence:

1. Pre-Performance Administrative Meeting: Introductions with principals to verify structural operations, student demographics, and review school-specific codes of conduct.
2. Performance Observation Phase: Live recording of behavioural indicators by designated observers while performances were underway on school fields or in assembly halls.
3. Post-Performance Debriefing and Interviews: Execution of student focus questions immediately after the show, supplemented by brief 10-to-15-minute semi-structured interviews with selected students and staff. Daily debriefing sessions were completed by the 9-member troupe to compile field notes.

Data Analysis

The collected qualitative data were analysed using manual thematic analysis. Interview transcriptions, field observation notes, and institutional administrative statements were systematically reviewed to identify recurrent concepts, phrases, and behavioural indicators. These codes were categorized into structural themes mapped directly to the guiding research questions.

Results and Findings

Demographic and Structural Characteristics of Outreach Schools

The broad audience across the twelve institutions (N = 3,824) exhibited an approximate aggregate gender distribution of 60% female and 40% male, with ages ranging from 11 to 17 years. The student cohort was largely uniform regarding socio-economic status, consisting primarily of children from smallholder agrarian families, rural artisans, and lower-level local government employees. Table 2 outlines the structural metrics across the visited institutions.

Table 2: Institutional Outreach Logistics and Performance Frequencies

S/N	Name of Visited School	Institutional Type	Target Audience Size	Plays Performed	Monologues Performed	Active Troupe Size
1	GSS LunTablung	Co-educational	700	2	1	5
2	Ganaka Memorial Girls College	Female-only	200	2	0	4
3	Peniel Bright Academy	Co-educational	560	2	0	4
4	Gonerit Memorial	Co-educational	300	2	2	4
5	GGG Kabwir	Co-educational	250	2	0	4
6	CCSS Dungung	Co-educational	200	2	1	4
7	Kabwir District CSS Lepchalim	Co-educational	90	2	1	5
8	GSS Dawaki	Co-educational	300	2	0	4
9	GSS LebwitKabwir	Co-educational	224	3	0	4
10	Anglican High School Dawaki	Co-educational	300	4	0	4
11	GSS Amper	Co-educational	300	2	1	5
12	GSS Kalashi	Co-educational	400	2	1	5
Total			3,824	27	7	52 (Agg.)

Source: *Theatre mass Fieldwork, 2025.*

The outreach covered a diverse institutional matrix, with co-educational public facilities representing 92% of the sites. The troupe maintained standard operating sizes (4 to 5 members per deployment), delivering 27 full play presentations and 7 monologue variations.

Research Question 1: Perceived Changes in Moral Reasoning

Thematic coding of responses from the student interview cohort revealed shifts in ethical awareness and value clarification across multiple thematic areas.

Table 3: Qualitative Coding of Student Responses and Ethical Interpretations

S/N	Primary Student Verbatim Statement	Qualitative Interpretation	Pedagogical Value Clarification
1	<i>"The play taught me that rich or poor addicts suffer the consequence of their action. I know my parents are poor but I must say no to drugs if I am ever going to be great."</i> (Respondent 1)	Rejection of economic determinism regarding substance vulnerability; recognition of universal consequence.	High moral awareness; personal agency chosen over environmental exposure.
2	<i>"Before I watched the play, the general feeling and thinking is love is only demonstrated through sex. I am glad your group came with a good advice for some of us who think otherwise."</i> (Respondent 2)	Deconstruction of pervasive peer misconceptions regarding adolescent relationships.	Development of interpersonal boundaries and informed choices.
3	<i>"This dress thing is serious; we used to believe that as a girl you must show your curves but your drama is teaching me to cover myself in decency."</i> (Respondent 3)	Re-evaluation of body image and social presentation against models of modesty.	Shift toward self-respect and intentional public presentation.
4	<i>"Most times we come to school late and we use our parents and the farm as excuse; this play is helping me see punctuality differently as a sign of responsibility."</i> (Respondent 4)	Transformation of punctuality from a rule enforced by punishment to an expression of personal accountability.	Advanced internalization of civic duty and structural respect.

5	<i>"The one on exam malpractice touched me most, and when you said one can go to jail for it, it made me think again."</i> (Respondent 5)	Recognition of the systemic legal and ethical consequences of academic dishonesty.	Moral reflection prompted by institutional and legal consequences.
6	<i>"Our school timetable has a lot to teach us, now I know why the timetable is so important to any serious student."</i> (Respondent 6)	Re-contextualization of basic school administrative rules as functional life skills.	Value added to structural discipline and organizational habits.

Source: *Theatre mass Fieldwork, 2025.*

These qualitative indices point to a clear processing of narrative content. Students systematically connected the dramatic choices made by stage characters to their personal lives, transitioning from an unreflective compliance with rules toward an intentional understanding of personal accountability.

Research Question 2: Institutional and Audience Acceptance

Audience response metrics indicated high acceptance of the intervention. Real-time feedback gathered at the conclusion of the performance sessions showed uniform appreciation across the student populations.

Table 4: Collective Audience Response and Program Acceptance

S/N	Indicator Evaluation Question	Unified Audience Feedback	Participant Proportion
1	Should the school administration allocate more time for these presentations?	Resounding "YES"	100% (N=3,824)
2	Are you tired of the program, or should the drama unit depart?	Resounding "NO"	100% (N=3,824)
3	Would you welcome a return visit from the drama team next term?	Resounding "YES"	100% (N=3,824)
Index	Overall Program Acceptance Rate	Total Program Acceptance	100%

Source: *Theatre mass Fieldwork, 2025.*

This uniform collective response shows the engagement generated by the live performances. The interactive model offered a stimulating break from standard lecturing, sustaining engagement across varying school types.

Research Question 3: Management Call for Continuous Subsidization

Interviews and administrative responses from school leadership teams confirmed a strong institutional demand for regular subsidized theatre outreach. Administrators noted that severe

school resource constraints prevent them from independently procuring specialized character-development materials. A senior administrative staff member at GSS LunTablung captured this sentiment during a post-performance presentation:

"I don't need to go back and tell you about things we have done here. We have learnt about three things here: No late coming because we don't have that in our timetable, no issues of boyfriend/girlfriend because you are to focus on school, and no examinations malpractice. In fact, we are very grateful. We have heard it and we have seen it, and the only thing I want to say is that we are very much appreciative... Continue your program; it will help the school and the nation generally. Thank you very much." (Transcribed Field Recording; Kanke, 00:00–00:53).

This testimonial emphasizes that administrators value educational theatre because it reinforces institutional discipline through a format that resonates with students.

Research Question 4: Structural Sustainability Challenges

Field observation notes and logistical logs highlighted critical structural challenges regarding the long-term sustainability of unsubsidized educational drama in rural communities:

- i. **Logistical Barriers:** Most target institutions are located in remote areas accessible only via unpaved pathways, requiring the team to use local motorcycle transport to move equipment and personnel between sites.
- ii. **Financial Disadvantaged Status:** None of the public institutions visited possessed internal budgetary allocations to support arts-based programming or compensate external facilitators.
- iii. **Opportunity Cost Framework:** If the 3,824 participating students had been charged a modest entry fee of One Thousand Naira (N1,000), the cumulative cost of Three Million and Eight Hundred and Twenty-Four Thousand Naira (N3,824,000) would represent a substantial financial burden for these families. This amount is equivalent to school fees or National Examination Registration costs (WAEC/NECO/JAMB) for several local youths. By completely absorbing all travel, accommodation, and literary printing costs, the organizing body ensured access without redirecting scarce household income away from core needs.

Plate 1: Showing a collage of photos of the Drama Outreach





Source: Theatremass Fieldwork, 2025.

The pictures summarise the daily outreach activities of the Theatremass outreach team. The Team move from their accommodation, taking off on motor bikes and arriving at a particular school. They present their plays and at the end donate literatures of play texts and Monologues for the school's library.

Discussion of Findings

The qualitative insights gained from this study provide field evidence supporting subsidized educational theatre as a viable tool for moral pedagogy within peripheral Nigerian schools. The self-reported changes in student moral reasoning align with Kohlberg's (1984) developmental frameworks and broader models of experiential learning. By framing ethical choices within narrative performance, the outreach allows students to engage with real-world choices, build empathy, and evaluate behavioural outcomes in an accessible format. This interactive approach moves beyond the rote memorization of rules, encouraging an internalization of ethical concepts. These insights match the conclusions of Okafor and Okoroafor (2017), who observe that educational drama deepens perspective-taking skills crucial for moral reasoning.

Similarly, the self-reported pro-social awareness expressed by the interview cohort highlights the practical utility of performance art in modelling social responsibility. Observing characters practice self-control and academic integrity within a shared narrative space helps students build the confidence to apply these behaviours in their everyday life. This dynamic supports the arguments of Eze and Chukwuma (2019) regarding drama's capacity to cultivate positive social skills. The findings challenge conventional assertions that moral instruction must be strictly didactic, demonstrating that arts-based approaches can prompt reflective behavioural changes essential for navigating the structural challenges associated with rural poverty.

The high acceptance rate across the 12 participating schools highlights the utility of the program. For youth navigating limited informational exposure and shifting traditional support structures, enhanced ethical reasoning serves as a valuable personal asset. These character assets build individual resilience, strengthen school community dynamics, and empower youths to make choices that support long-term local development.

Crucially, complete subsidization was essential to the project's success, removing financial barriers that would otherwise exclude underprivileged students from these learning experiences. The intervention balances qualitative findings from past studies (Adeyemi & Olaniyan, 2018; Ibrahim & Musa, 2020), expanding the empirical baseline for integrating creative performance arts into formal rural educational outreach.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that fully subsidized educational drama presentations offer a functional and responsive pedagogical framework for secondary schools within Kanke Local Government Area. The experiential, narrative quality of live theatre serves as an engaging learning tool, helping students understand and internalize ethical principles more effectively than traditional lectures alone. The positive responses from students and the strong endorsement from school administrators underscore the value of arts-based interventions in underserved rural communities.

Developing mature moral reasoning equips young people with the cognitive tools needed to navigate ethical challenges in their environment, while fostering pro-social awareness supports community cooperation, empathy, and personal responsibility. These outcomes are vital for building individual resilience and supporting the long-term well-being of rural youth, helping them develop into active and civically responsible citizens.

Recommendations

To sustain and expand the impact of educational drama interventions, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. **Institutional University-Community Partnerships:** Theatre arts and education departments within Nigerian tertiary institutions should establish structured annual outreach initiatives, delivering educational performances to peripheral secondary schools to support national values and character development.
2. **Faith-Based and Civic Organization Engagement:** Faith-based and community organizations with active drama departments should view school outreach as a vital civic service, designing targeted productions to encourage positive citizenship across public, private, and mission schools.
3. **Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Reorientation:** Private enterprises, financial institutions, and manufacturing corporations should broaden their CSR portfolios. In addition to physical infrastructure investments like building renovations, they should provide financial backing for arts-based programs focused on youth values and ethical development.

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