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Creative Arts, Recreational Activities, and Free Play as Correlates of Creative Skills Development Among Primary School Pupils

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Imaobong Essien[1], Victor M. Alasa[2*]

[1]University of Ibadan, Oyo, Nigeria

[2]The School of Pacific Arts, Communication and Education (SPACE),
The University of the South Pacific, Suva, Fiji
Corresponding Email: *victor.alasa@usp.ac.fj

Abstract

This study examined exposure to creative arts, recreational activities, and free play as correlates of creative skills development among primary school pupils in Uyo metropolis of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. The study adopted the correlational survey research design. The population of the study comprised all primary two pupils. The sample for this study consisted of 500 primary two pupils. The study adopted the multistage random sampling technique to draw samples for the study. The instrument used for data collection was designed by the researchers and named Creative Arts, Recreational Activities, Free Play, and Creative Skills Development Questionnaire (CARAFPCSDQ). The instrument was pilot tested for reliability with an index of 0.81. Three research questions were asked, and three hypotheses tested at 0.05, level of significance. Data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistics of frequency count and simple percentage to answer research questions while Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05, level of significance. The results showed that primary school pupils are exposed to creative arts, recreational activities, and free play. The result also showed a significant relationship between exposure to creative arts, free play, and creative skills development among primary school pupils. The study, however, found no significant relationship between recreational activities and creative skills development of primary school pupils. Based on the findings of the study, recommendations were made among which are, government should train and post more creative arts teachers to schools. Parents and teachers should create more time and an enabling environment for pupils to engage in free play at home and in school.

Keywords: Creative skills, Creativity, Creative arts, Recreational activities, Free play

INTRODUCTION

Primary school education fortifies students' feet so they can reach the top of the educational ladder. It provides a strong basis for pursuing higher education. The Federal Government of Nigeria made basic education free and mandatory after realizing that it is crucial to the success or failure of the entire educational system. Primary education is defined by the National Policy on Education as instruction provided to children between the ages of six and twelve (FGN, 2013).For students to succeed at higher educational levels, primary education is extremely important. Therefore, Comfort, Usen, and Ekpenyong (2013) argued that it must educate students how to utilize and operate scientific instruments in order to impart rudimentary and general understanding of science. This would enable them to become familiar with such foundational information as they go to higher educational levels. The aim of primary schools is to introduce meanings, provide the groundwork for knowledge through education, prepare every child for life, and nurture them in accordance with their unique skills, talents, and creative potential.

Creative skills would help learners to acquire permanent literacy and numeracy, communicate effectively both verbally and symbolically. This is in relation to creativity which can be traced to the inculcation of literacy skills and ability to communicate effectively, this is because creativity is not known in the inside but requires a display through symbolic and nonverbal communication. The objectives can also be linked to the child's creative skills in his ability to think critically and reflectively. This is because creativity is first conceived through critical and reflective thinking to bring about something novel and useful. Creativity can be associated with the child's ability to develop manipulative skills to effectively function and be useful both to himself and the society at large. It is said that Plato was the first to advocate for early childhood education (Akinbote et al., 2001). According to him, this is essential since any impression that a person may wish to convey is most readily stamped and taken during this early childhood stage. Since innovation is driving global economic growth in the twenty-first century, one of the most important desired educational outcomes is creativity. Schools are expected to teach and evaluate creativity because the future workforce will require the ability to be innovative. In addition to the financial benefits, reviving and cultivating creativity is justified as a social good for both individuals and society as a whole. Since the end of the 1990s, educational policy makers have come to understand how important it is to foster students' creative potential (Rean, 2015). The goal of curriculum policies and educational vision alignment is to support the growth of students' creative potential and their commitment to fostering their creative minds.

Despite all of this, there are few results or indications of students' inventiveness. According to Bennie (2009), the traditional notion of creativity needs to be expanded to include both everyday problem-solving tasks and an exceptional class of people. The significance of classroom atmosphere in fostering students' creative potential has been acknowledged by researchers. Additionally, there has long been a notion that students tend to think more convergently than divergently when faced with high-stakes exams. Additionally, the classroom's emphasis on performance learning culture discourages innovation. Thus, one of the most important questions is how to properly actualize students' creative potential. According to Plucker et al. (2004), creativity is the interplay of aptitude, process, and environment through which a person or group creates a tangible product that is both unique and beneficial as defined within a social context. The four components of creativity—the individual, the process, the result, and the environment—are included in this definition. According to Akinbote and Ogunranti (2001), children's creative abilities emerge and grow through environmental exploration and manipulation. Two processes are involved in

creativity: (1) thinking and (2) producing. The creation or application of an idea is creativity. One is only imaginative rather than creative if they have ideas but do not put them into practice. The term "creative arts" refers to a variety of recreational activities that engage children's minds, bodies, and senses and allow for imaginative and creative expression, such as music, art, dance, and theater.

Recreational activities are integral part of general education having its own curriculum where the main idea is that “the subject shall stimulate physical use of the body to enhance individual sensing, experiencing, learning, and creating. The social aspect of recreational (physical) activities means that it is important for promoting fair play and respect for one another. Co-curricular activities as well as physical and health education are included in the primary school curriculum because even though they are seen as after school activities or non-academic, they help to develop pupil’s intellectual, reflective thinking and strengthen their classroom learning. When a pertinent extracurricular activity is planned that relates to the material presented in the classroom, students gain practical experiences that reinforce their theoretical understanding. While physical and extracurricular activities help aesthetic development, character development, physical growth, moral values, and creativity, intellectual aspects of personality are only completed in the classroom. Teachers design the variety of exercises and their degree of complexity based on the age and skill level of the students. Every teacher's goal is to provide opportunity for every kid to learn and become proficient in the activities they participate in, feel joy from doing so, and gain social acceptance through interacting and cooperating with peers. Since "movement" is a trait of an exploring kid, emphasis is placed on this idea. The range of leisure activities and how they are carried out can have a significant impact on how well primary school students develop their creative abilities (Armstrong & Winsely, 2005). So what exactly is recreational activity? These are frequent activities carried out for enjoyment or leisure. Reading, playing sports, hunting, studying, traveling, watching movies, listening to music, gardening, and more are some of these activities. Students experience new situations, absorb information from various fields, build relationships with peers and adults, explore their surroundings, develop their intellectual and physical abilities, and learn about their inner range of emotions through recreational activities, which are typically play.

A youngster learns about taking risks, solving problems, dealing with consequences, and getting along with people via play. By reducing adult involvement or influence in play experiences and by questioning some deeply held ideas, students can engage in free play as a variant of play. Pupils can be seen building huts, riding every wheeled device in the school,

climbing trees, play fighting, sliding down mudslides, using stair rails as monkey bars, or just lying in the long grass and talking in the atmosphere of free play. This lack of interference sparks their creative spirit. Although it might be difficult for adults to define and comprehend children's play, children have a strong desire to play. Play connects all facets of learning and growth. Children's play becomes increasingly complicated and challenging when they have time to play. Russ (2003) states that students who engage in free play explore materials and learn about their properties, use their knowledge of materials to play imaginatively, express their emotions and reveal their inner feelings, maintain emotional balance, physical and mental health and well-being, develop a sense of who they are, their value, and that of others, learn social skills of sharing, taking turns, and negotiating, solve problems, transition from support to independence, develop communication and language skills, repeat patterns that reflect their prevailing interests and concerns, and practice, develop, and master skills in all subject areas.

Students gain social, conceptual, and creative abilities as well as expand their knowledge and comprehension of the world around them through free play, which is an essential experience. Free play is intricate and very inspiring. It's obvious that defining play is challenging. According to Moyles (2005:4), attempting to understand the idea of play is like attempting to catch bubbles because every time something seems to be there, its transient nature prevents it from being grabbed. Perhaps it is more beneficial to think of play as a process that encompasses a variety of behaviors, abilities, opportunities, and motives. According to Moyles (2005), play is a complex layer of activities. Early proponents of childhood education, like Froebel, Montessori, and Steiner, held the view that since childhood and adulthood are two quite different states, adults shouldn't try to prepare children for adulthood. This is due to their belief that children are highly intrinsically motivated and self-motivated. According to Froebel, children are resilient and self-assured, and they see things through to the end through play. According to these researchers, play is seen as a potential mechanism that stimulates creativity in elementary school students since play is seen as a factor that may stimulate or improve the development of creative abilities.

Statement of the Problem

Creative skill is important for personal, educational, economic, and social development. Modern societies depend heavily on creative skills for better living. It is therefore imperative that creative skills are developed at the primary school level so that children could meet societal challenges later in life. However, in recent times this has been grossly neglected in school with little or no attention given to it. The curriculum seems to play down on it such

that both teachers and pupils turn a laissez-faire attitude towards creativity. This has resulted in poor performance in both academic and vocational activities. It is therefore no wonder that the development of science and technology seems to be very slow in Africa and Nigeria particularly. Researchers have expressed concern over this ugly incidence and concerted research endeavours have directed towards the improvement of creative skills among primary school pupils.

While this study presumed this problem to be due to deprivation and lack of exposure of children to creative activities that could enhance their creative skills development, other researchers attributed it to factors such as poor instructional procedure, teachers' insufficient knowledge as well as indecisive formulation and implementation of educational policies. Despite research effort over the years, the fact remains that the problem of poor creative skills development still persists among primary school pupils. Therefore, this study investigated the level of exposure to creative arts, recreational activities and free play and the creative skills development of primary school pupils in Uyo Metropolis of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.

Significance of the Study

Creativity provides immense benefits to children, teachers, parents, school administrators, policy makers and the society at large. The findings of this study would be of benefit to pupils as it would expose them to the various activities that have tendencies to develop their creative skills. The findings of this study will also help teachers to focus on relevant activities that would foster creativity among primary school pupils.

School administrators will benefit from this study as it would help them design activities for children that will further enhance and develop their creative abilities. Parents are not left out as the findings of this study will serve as an eye opener to them on the importance of allowing children to explore their environment and not viewing play as a waste of time. It will assist policy makers to decide on the right policies for the right population with corresponding facilities and funding. Finally, the larger society will benefit from the findings of this study as pupils begin to engage in creative activities that would boost societal standards and further more solve pressing societal problems.

Hypotheses

In this study, the following hypotheses were tested at, 0.05 level of significance.

1. There is no significant relationship between exposure to creative art and the development of creative skills among primary school pupils in Uyo Metropolis.
2. There is no significant relationship between exposure to recreational activities and the development of creative skills among primary school pupils in Uyo Metropolis.

3. There is no significant relationship between exposure to free play and the development of creative skills among primary school pupils in Uyo Metropolis

METHOD

The population of the study consisted of all primary two (2) pupils of public primary schools in Uyo metropolis of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. There are 47 public primary schools currently existing in study (SUBEB, 2017). Participants for the study were drawn using multistage random sampling technique. At stage one, two Local Government Areas were randomly selected from the four Local Government Areas in Uyo metropolis. At stage two, eight (8) schools were selected using random sampling techniques from each of the two Local Government Areas. At stage three, in each of the eight (8) schools, primary two (2) intact classes were selected from each school making a total number of sixteen (16) schools. A total number of five hundred (512) primary two pupils participated in the study. The researcher's reason for selecting primary two class is because the pupils are still in the concrete operational stage. One of the characteristics of this stage of development among others is that children at this stage gain the abilities of conservation (number, area, volume) that is they recognize that certain physical characteristics of objects remain the same even when their outward appearance changes and, reversibility, that is their ability to think through the steps in a problem.

Instrumentation

The instrument used for data collection was the Creative Arts, Recreational Activities and Free Play Questionnaire (CARAFPQ). The researcher developed this instrument after considering the level of the participants and the importance of creative arts, recreational activities and free play as potential positive agents to their creative skills development. The instrument is divided into two sections, A and B. Section A collected demographic data of the respondents. Section B contained 15 items on pupils' exposure to creative arts, recreational activities and free play. The respondents were required to respond to each item by ticking Yes or No. To ascertain the reliability of the instrument, the instrument was administered to 20 primary two pupils who were not part of the initial sample. Split-half was used to test the reliability and the coefficient is 0.81.

Data Analysis

The researcher used descriptive statistics such as frequency count and simple percentage to analyze the demographic information and answer the research questions. Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) was used in testing the hypotheses.

Results

The results of the study are presented in tables with interpretations given below the Table 1, Table 2, and Table 3.

Hypotheses Testing

H_{o1}: There is no significant relationship between exposure to creative arts and creative skills development among primary school pupils in Uyo Metropolis**.**

Table 1. Creative Arts and Creative Skills Development among Primary School Pupils

Variables	N	Mean	SD	R	Sig
Exposure to Creative Arts	500	5.49	0.91		
				.62	.02
Creative Skills Development	500	76.37	18.07		

Table 1 showed a significant relationship between exposure to creative arts and creative skills development of primary school pupils. It showed the mean of 5.49 and 76.37 for exposure to creative arts and creative skills development respectively at $r = 0.62$, $p<0.05$. The null hypothesis was therefore rejected, indicating that there is a significant relationship between exposure to creative arts and creative skills development among primary school pupils.

H_{o2}: There is no significant relationship between exposure to recreational activities and creative skills development among primary school pupils in Uyo Metropolis**.**

Table 2. Recreational Activities and Creative Skills Development among Primary School Pupils

Variables	N	Mean	SD	R	Sig
Exposure to recreational activities	500	5.56	1.01		
				-.02	.64
Creative skills Development	500	76.37	18.07		

Table 2 showed the relationship between exposure to recreational activities and creative skills development of primary school pupils. The table revealed that the mean and standard deviation for recreational activities and creative skills are 5.56, 1.01 and 76.37, 18.07 respectively at $r = -0.02$, $p>0.05$. This indicates no significant relationship therefore the null hypothesis was accepted. Hence there is no significant relationship between exposure to recreational activities and creative skills development among pupils.

H_{o3}: There is no significant relationship between exposure to free play and creative skills development among primary school pupils in Uyo Metropolis**.**

Table 3. Exposure to Free Play and Creative Skills Development among Primary School Pupils

Variables	N	Mean	SD	R	Sig
Exposure to Free Play	500	5.75	1.01		
				.99	.02

Creative skills Development	500	76.37	18.07

Table 3 shows the analysis of the relationship between exposure to free play and creative skills development of primary school pupils. The mean and standard deviation for free play was 5.75 and 1.01 while the mean and standard deviation for creative skills was 76.37 and 18.07. $r = 0.99$, $p<0.05$ revealed a significant relationship hence the null hypothesis was rejected. This indicates that there is a significant relationship between exposure to free play and creative skills development among pupils.

Creative Arts and Creative Skills Development among Primary School Pupils

The finding of hypothesis one showed that there is significant relationship between exposure to creative arts and creative skills development of primary school pupils. Exposing pupils to creative arts early in primary school lays a solid foundation for the development of creative skills. Children may come into school with some level of creative potentials in them but if they are not exposed to subject like creative arts which will arouse them and challenge them, the potential may lie dormant and underdeveloped throughout their school years. This finding agrees with Slahova et al. (2017) who found that the best of all primary school learners' creative imagination develops as the lessons of visual art, aimed at teaching them to understand what is beautiful in art, as well as through their being involved in the creative process and creating art works themselves. Exposing pupils to creative arts equip pupils for effective verbal and nonverbal communications. It therefore makes pupils think of ways of creatively representing ideas, thoughts and concepts in symbolic form that communicate meaningfully to others. This is supported by Alter et al. (2009) who stated that the key to the world of creativity is the expertise of how the child can communicate through abstract symbols and also decipher the communication of others. When pupils get involved in creative arts their creative skills are sharpened, imaginative abilities are enhanced as they get curious about the work of other people and make effort to improve upon them or even create something better out of what others have done. These imaginative abilities or skills are the enablers of creativity that can change their world dramatically in the future.

Recreational Activities and Creative Skills Development among Primary School Pupils

Finding of hypothesis two indicated that there is no significant relationship between exposure to recreational activities and creative skills development of primary school pupils. This finding is contrary to Berk (1999) who found significant relationship between recreational activities and creative skills stating, that engagement of children in recreational activity, not only enhance their brain development but also prepares them for creativity. This finding however agrees with Lambourne, Hansen, Szabo, Lee, Herrmann & Donnelly (2013)

who found no relationship between recreational activities and creative skills development but maintained that participation in physical activity merely helps to develop fine and gross motor skills, hand-eye coordination, balance, agility but does not necessarily develop creative skills. This may be so because the only aspect of recreational activities primary school pupils is exposed to is physical activities such as running, jumping, throwing, catching, thug-of-war and hid and seek. These activities are mostly effective for muscle development and not creative skills as it were. Another reason for this finding may be that there are no creational facilities that are purposely built in primary schools to give pupils the maximum benefit of recreation.

Exposure to Free Play and Creative Skills Development among Primary School Pupils

Finding of hypothesis three revealed that there is significant relationship between exposure to free play and creative skills development. This means that pupils can develop creative skills as they engage in free play. Where pupils are given opportunity to play freely without any structured, systematic arrangement it affords the pupils the chance to put into action novel ideas. This finding corroborated Howard-Jones et al. (2010) who reported that allowing children to first have time to engage in free play before conducting a creative task enforces better output and more creative ideas. It is important to allow children explore experiment, initiate their own play, and interact with their environment alongside their peers freely. Initiating their own play without adult interference makes pupil's inventors.

Originality emerges from simple play that arouses pupil's creativity as they generate ideas that are unique to them. Free play is one aspect of children's play that is essential for cognitive development and skills for self-reliance. This finding is also in line with Fisher (2011) who found significant relationship between free play and creativity, stating that it takes creative thinking to generate creative play, children cannot forget process they discover by themselves during play and that leads to creative problem solving, logical thinking. Lester & Russell (2008) supported this finding that free play is not only enjoyable but also crucial for the process of learning and creative skills development. Supporting this finding Fisher (2011) affirmed that free play introduces children to the development of creative skills such as planning patterns, classification, volume, area and measurement preparing them to lunch into the scientific world. Children gain a lot during free play as they observe existing phenomena to gain insight into creative designs and productions. Christensen (2014) agreed that free play is necessary for creativity and that without a play-like attitude creative insights are hidden from children.

CONCLUSION

Creative skills development is a crucial area of development that all primary school pupils ought to achieve in good time during their period of schooling. The National Policy on Education identified this area of development as one of the aims and objectives of primary education. While concerted effort is being made to produce educated citizen it is of utmost importance to ensure that the school system produce individuals that possess creative skills that are needed not only for personal improvement but for making substantial contribution to the economic, scientific and technological development of the society. On this premise therefore this study examined variables that would help primary school pupils develop creative skills at their own pace while doing their normal activities. Hence exposure to creative arts has been found in this study to have significant relationship with creative skill development. Although primary school pupils in Uyo metropolis of Akwa Ibom State are exposed to recreational activities but this study found that recreational activities do not significantly relate to their creative skills development. Play is important to children hence this study found that free play is particularly essential in boosting primary school pupils' creative skills development.

SUGGESTIONS

Based on the findings from this study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Government should train more creative arts teachers so that each school can have enough teachers in creative arts to exposure pupils to creative arts in schools for the development of creative skills.
2. Ministries of Education should on a regular basis organise workshops and conferences for teachers on creative arts to equip them with current pedagogy in the interest of the pupils.
3. Parent Teachers Association (PTA) should collaborate with government to provide adequate recreational facilities in schools for the pupils so that they can derive the full benefit from recreational activities.
4. The school should from time to time arrange to take pupils to recreation centres where pupils can engage in recreational activities that boost their creative acumen.
5. Parents should create space and time for pupils to engage in free play at home.
6. Teachers should make the school environment conducive for pupils to engage in free play as this will enhance their creative skills development.

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