

Drama in Education: Stimulating Learning Preparedness among Primary School Pupils

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Abstract

For several decades, researchers in education have continually sought for ways of improving input and output for adequate productivity in the industry. This move has given rise to a lot of experiments resulting in innovations and explorations of new creative ideas to enhance teaching and learning. Towing this path, this study seeks to explore Drama in Education (DIE) to prepare pupils for teaching and learning after school breaks. To achieve this sole objective, an experiment based research was conducted on primary three pupils in a Private Primary School owned by a state institution. DIE in this instance, is not adopted as methodology for teaching but as treatment for psychological mind set of pupils especially after break periods in the school. It was intended to determine the impact of drama performances in prodding and preparing pupils for lessons after break hour characterised by, distractions, noise, play and physical activities which could affect their readiness to learn. The observation method was used over a period of six weeks, to assess the outcome of this experiment and the findings of this research culminated in recommendations with the intention of promoting the use of DIE for pupils' mental readiness to be receptive to learning after breaks during teaching in the classroom.

Keywords: break periods, drama in education, drama performances, learning preparedness, primary school pupils

Introduction

Education at the elementary stage should be targeted at an all-round human development that will help learners acquire skills, knowledge, values and attitudes. This is to aid positive contributions to social, economic, moral and political development of the society. Education at the primary school level should necessarily provide the bedrock and foundation for further education. A survey of the situation reveals that most children in the developing countries are denied basic needs, care and affection during their developmental years and this often affect their intellectual, psychological and physiological development as they grow into maturity (Grantham-McGregor, Cheung, Cueto, Glewwe, Richter, and Strupp (2007). The situation also obtained among Nigerian children, negates the overriding purpose of education, which is centred on building a responsible citizen in the society while greatly contributing and enhancing future personality development. Education is vital for development of the above listed attributes in the learner in order for the child to give back what he has acquired because he/

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she is a product of the society. Therefore, education at the basic level must help learners develop and shape the three major domains of human development, namely, cognitive, affective and psychomotor.

A look at the current curriculum for primary schools, acknowledge the fact that there are numerous methodologies in existence for teaching and learning but drama method is still underutilised. Most Nigerian drama educators seem to have more passion for integration of drama methods at secondary and tertiary education at the detriment of primary education which is the beginning of formal education. Many professions like medicine, engineering and law, have immensely benefited from drama patronage through its popularity and constant researches where it exists on their threshold as process drama, psycho drama, theatre for development (TFD) and drama therapy. This is indeed a good development which should start from the elementary level to be solidified at other levels of education. The pedagogical aspect of drama should be fully patronised as a major tool for enhancing and improving teaching and learning. Studies have shown that drama when properly implemented in teaching and learning would improve academic performance of pupils and enhance their personal development. (Umukoro, 2002, Bamidele, 2007, 2007, Fulton, 2012 and Howell and Heap, 2013).

Meaning of Drama in Education

Early scholars and educationists in providing solutions to how to teach effectively have come up with many methods which at certain times were widely accepted until they came under public scrutiny and criticism; an act that has led to extinction or modification of some. Some outstanding educators in teaching methods in this category include Montessori, Waldort, Froebel and Reggio. Subsequently, other educationists after them advocated segments of their approaches modifying them to be learner-centred, teacher-centred, content focused and interactive teaching methods. Drama by its characteristics, projects the aims and objectives of education. This in a way creates a symbiotic relationship between the two concepts. This intricately intertwined relationship between drama and education has been of immense interest to educators over the years. This has led to the evolution of various instructional and teaching methods in formal and informal teaching and learning process. Drama as well as education aims at evolving behavioural modifications meant to reform the society. The introduction of drama into education is therefore germane as it equips the teacher in creating a responsive learning environment to meet the diverse needs of learners.

Drama in Education is a form of dramatic activities centred on fictional role-taking and improvisation not meant for performance but for instruction within education context. Drama in Education is a pedagogical approach to education

that places the individual learner at the centre of the learning experience where meaning is not absolute but rather negotiated. Types of drama activities also range from extra-curricular activities in school musicals and promotional events; in drama clubs, speech training, self-expression, emotional development and confidence building... (Wee, 2009, p.12). Drama in education finds expression in the use of drama as an educational pedagogy for students at all levels of learning. It facilitates student's physical, emotional and cognitive development.

This definition suggests active participation of students in the teaching and learning process. The outcome is that learners will be able to develop their intellect and ability to learn more and confront challenges through the acquisition of problem solving skills. Also, O'Toole portrays drama in education as, "a functional role play and 'service' within the curriculum" (2004, p.55). Drama, here simply fits in with other subjects, to be a teaching subject. Due to its functional role play, drama is assumed by many to be of a lower artistic order than drama as an art form but which has a positive effect on teaching and learning situations. When a drama in education lesson is properly utilized it would equip learners to acquire skills, attitudes and values. These entire enable them go through problem solving process thereby enhancing their self-confidence.

Most importantly, drama in education encourages learners to be independent and to develop skills of self-help, self-realization and self-actualization. It gives an all-round development to learners thereby helping in the fulfilment and attainment of objectives of education. "Drama in education also focuses on participants' process of exploration and meaning-making" (Schonmann, 2000, p.947). As participants engage in a drama education session or series of sessions, they create a unique set of social relationships that becomes a single unit of experience capable of analysis and study (Carroll, 1996, p.77). As a fusion of many related disciplines and art forms like storytelling, radio, or television drama, improvisation [process drama], speech, acting, directing and play productions drama in education is a useful tool in pedagogy. "As well as holding an educational nature, drama also has the effect of "Catharsis" which is to purify from some ... emotions" (Isyar and Akay, 2017, p. 215). This has the ability to comply with social inclusion in facilitating pupils' ability to display positive or negative emotions. More so, pupils who express themselves, "experience a social relaxation and sharing, and thus, they have more chance to concentrate on their lessons" (Isyar and Akay, 2017, p. 215).

Subsequently, Drama in education is an umbrella term to explain the totality of the subject as needed to enhance the teaching and learning of both the teacher and pupil. The major challenge of drama in education in primary schools is not only its non-inclusion in the curriculum but that of scarcity and non-availability

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of trained, qualified and experienced teachers in this field to implement its theory into practice. Learners in most of the cases of drama teaching are at the mercy of teachers with insufficient competence driven by their flair for drama and not the teachers' expertise. Drama education is more significant in developing countries like Nigeria because of its relevance to education and pedagogy most especially, in early childhood education where music, dance and drama are relevant and find expression in games and storytelling. These mediums "provide opportunities for relaxed learning and group experiences' especially during 'Play'" (Bamidele, 2007, p.15). Drama education is 'functional literacy' because of its importance in enhancing learning and positively re-directing and re-channelling children toward a desirable outcome.

It is worthy to emphasize here that

DIE is not a polished performance for an audience as conceived by many non-practitioners. It is an avenue where teachers and/or facilitators provide safe spaces for exploring different topics through drama and dramatic activities in a school environment without necessarily paying attention to the elements of drama (Adedina, 2017. p28).

This also informs O'Hara's position that drama in education "is seen as a way of teaching and learning, rather than a conventional school subject with definite knowledge to be acquired or skills to be learned" (2001, p.318). This however is not denying the fact that in recent time drama has been included in the school curriculum as a subject in primary and secondary schools. The most recent development in Nigeria being the inclusion of Creative and Cultural Art as a subject in the curriculum, which has produced a fusion of Fine Arts, Music and Drama, thereby making the latter gain a somewhat popularity.

Drama in Education is a multisensory mode of learning that is designed to increase awareness of self (mind, body, and voice) and others (collaboration and empathy), improve clarity and creativity in communication of verbal and nonverbal ideas, and deepen understanding of human behaviour motivation, diversity culture and history thereby boosting the academic performance of the students. "Drama in Education helps the personal development of student, is an effective method and provides learning by doing and experience" Isyar and Akay (2017, p. 215). When it comes to dealing with drama within an educational context one need not struggle with defining terms, rather the essential understanding is of what drama can offer. The major concern here is with the experiences of the pupils and on how drama may function as a means to explore a variety of intense personal, social and educational issues. "The richness of classroom drama lies in its potential to achieve change of understanding..." (Bolton,1993: 9). It sets out to determine the effectiveness of drama as a teaching methodology in the

classroom environment and in relation to the school curriculum. Structure in a classroom drama starts from the planning; from that moment where teachers select the method of teaching (DIE) and the structure for teaching sessions. This will enable the teacher to take into consideration the learning outcomes of the teaching session, the characteristics of the learners, and practical requirements for the lesson. The teacher must necessarily know how to use drama for the achievements of educational objectives because through drama in education, imaginary contexts are created in the classroom as metaphors of the real world. Therefore, the core purpose of the education that Drama in Education offers is in the change of understanding.

There is criticism that Drama in Education over emphasises the transformative value of education rather than its aesthetic value despite a consensus among Drama in Education proponents to utilise theatre elements within classroom drama; but this criticism has been overridden by Bowel and Heaps, (2003) identification of common theatre elements to be focus, metaphor, tension, symbol, contrast, role, time, and space which are all critical to proper practice of DIE for teaching and learning. The importance of using DIE is summed up by Tombak, (2014, p. 1) as, “achieving expression of feelings in a healthy way, developing creative imagination in children, giving a chance to children to think and express themselves independently and developing children’s social awareness and cooperative consciousness”. In a similar opinion, Athiemoolam (2018) extols the advantages of DIE in the classroom as having potentials to promote learners’ imagination, expression, creativity, flexibility, imagination and critical thinking. DIE is therefore an enlashed and embodied approach to induce learning to occur during teaching.

Statement of the Problem

Poor academic performance at primary and post primary schools has continued to be a major concern for the parents and other education stakeholders. Pupils’ interest in learning dwindle due to loss of concentration, enthusiasm and motivation which will ultimately result in poor academic performance. Studies on the effect of teachers teaching methodologies measured in terms of teaching strategies and creativity on students learning have found a positive relationship between teachers’ effectiveness and students’ academic performance. Creating a conducive environment for learning transcends physical provisions. It was noted that the first three periods of learning from 8.15 – 10.30am before break are the most receptive hours for learning. It involves a proper mind set, full acclimatisation, psychological readiness and a balanced opinion on the part of pupils. Poor handling or lack of attention to specified areas, results in producing

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students with low self-esteem, poor problems-solving capabilities' students who may be irresponsible to themselves and the society at large, culminating in students with poor academic performance. Teachers are yet to come to terms with the many readily and available solutions that Drama in Education proffers to pupils because teachers are not equipped with creative skills and strategies that can aid true manifestation of DIE for effective learning.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study is to examine the immediate impact of drama presentations in the classroom as a strategy to tackle psychological distractions, inactivity or in some cases, hyper activity for learning especially after long breaks in schools. It is also to increase attention span of students and their ability to concentrate at learning activities after a period of play and physical exercises.

Significance of the Study

Findings of this study will be of benefit to teachers, educationists and scholars who might find it useful in furthering studies in related areas. To teachers and educators, it is hoped that this study will provide valuable information to reflect on helping pupils achieve their academic goals. By so doing, they can stimulate enthusiasm and enhance learning abilities of learners through drama to explore new experiences that will enable them look within and provide solutions to seemingly difficult situations. It will also answer the questions of what to teach and how to teach on the part of the teacher via dramatic activities in less cumbersome approaches.

Scope of the Study

This study focused on adopting drama in education for stimulating pupils psychologically in preparing them for teaching and learning after break hours. The study is therefore restricted to primary three school pupils in Staff School, Adeniran Ogunsanya College of Education, Lagos State. The process lasted a period of six weeks of classroom drama performances as an impetus for learning.

Population of study

A population of 20 pupils of primary three class were involved in the study. Another population of thirty student teachers in training in the Department of Theatre Arts made up research assistants as actors, recorders, drummers, dancers and observers.

Methodology

Drama skits were written to address aspects of growing up that conform with the ages of pupils. These areas include, personal hygiene, obedience to authority, peer influence and sex education. Drama skits were performed for pupils in one of the arms of primary three class between the age range of 7-9years. The total no of pupils in class were twenty, for a fifteen (15) minute performance which took place in front of the classroom immediately after long break hours for a period of six weeks by research assistants (teachers in training at the Department of Theatre Arts AOCOED) who also doubled as performers. A new set of performers took part in the drama on weekly basis for variety to prevent monotony of characters to pupils and avoid boredom. Each drama session starts with a song accompanied with music that touches on the theme or aspects of the performance. Drama takes place with little or no props and costumes, as only fragments are used. Dance is choreographed, accompanied by music with minimal and simple movements. Students are encouraged to join in this session which serves as the opening and closing glee.

All drama presentations are derived from improvisations in this experiment and drama skits are presented in not more than fifteen minutes. The language is simple, full of rhythm with very little conversation but have more of visuals for aesthetics. The idea behind this is to reduce 'talk' to the barest level so that pupils do not feel preached at and loose interest. While drama is going on, brightly coloured diagrams of main characters, settings and events in drama presentations are displayed on cardboard papers in form of drawings for further illustrations. At the end of presentations, pupils are given opportunities and encouraged to make contributions on the lessons or morals of drama. The whole process is rounded off by repeating same opening song, music and dance for emphasis and remembrance on the part of pupils.

Findings

A lot of discoveries were made during this experiment, which to an extent is expected to affect academic performance of pupils in terms of participatory learning. Some of these findings are highlighted below.

- Pupils are ready for and attentive to drama
- Pupils participate in drama process
- Pupils are lively and re-energised after drama
- Pupils' ability to concentrate during next lesson period is improved
- Rowdiness, noise, play and lack of energy is reduced during next learning session
- Teacher often make reference to drama skit to buttress aspects of lesson

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- Pupils eagerly await drama sessions on agreed days, which is on Wednesdays
- Pupils quickly and readily settle down for drama after break without much prodding

Challenges

This experiment was characterised with a lot of challenges. Most prominent among them was reluctance to allow external influence on teaching. However, after much persuasions, the school authority was convinced of our good intentions and agreed to spare not more than a few minutes only out of the next lesson after break periods on Wednesdays. Fifteen minutes of drama in just a single day was inadequate to effectively determine the extent of the success of this experiment, however considerable improvement was observed in pupils' readiness for lessons. Research assistants were also impeded by time due to their academic timetable which only allowed them to be on the field on Wednesdays. Also, the non-inclusion of drama/dramatic activities in the rigid school curriculum made the experiment appear, alien and abstract and was not well integrated. Instead of complementing teachers' efforts it was seen as a competitor and possible distractions from delivering the objectives of the school curriculum.

More so, a lot of conditions which amounted to restrictions were on placed the experiment. For instance, only one arm of primary three was released as beneficiaries of the experiment. So instead of drama presentations going on simultaneously in all arms, research assistants took turns in groups with just a single class for six weeks. The involvement of more classes at the same level would have provided a good platform for the experiment.

Above all, the fifteen minutes approved for performance was grossly inadequate and posed difficulties making it almost impossible to achieve the aim of the experiment. The time was not sufficient enough to explore and address themes of drama presentations. This was what led to the use of graphical illustrations in form of colourful drawings to buttress certain important ideas in the performance. This, however turned out a good innovation thereby enabling the attainment of goals. Pupils also enjoyed these creative interjections to spice presentations, which obviously tasked their imaginative abilities to constructively engage their senses of sight and hearing simultaneously during performance.

Conclusion

The traditional link between drama in education and entertainment has the possibility of increasing the power of Drama to prepare pupils for education. One problem however, is that education is still seen too narrowly as an activity which occurs formally and mainly through listening, reading, writing and computing. Education has not been recognised as occurring most powerfully and most

enduringly through social enactments. This approach to preparatory learning through drama is basically an offshoot of the indifferent experiences of teachers, parents, administrators and other stakeholders in the education sector who have a narrow or shallow knowledge of drama. Drama here, is a mirror of self-examination and evaluation, especially in understanding human motivation and behaviour. Drama in Education is an important tool that can promote effective learning despite lack of focus that could be caused by a distracted mind, if creatively approached. There are indications that drama can be used to expand pupils' awareness and enable them to look at reality through dramatic pressure and imagination, in preparing them psychologically for learning. These imply that both cognitive and emotional domains are inclusive and cannot be separated from Drama in Education.

any teaching, no matter how focused the learning objectives are, it is important not to lose sight of the fact that it is above all a human enterprise. Therefore, this demands a level of sensitivity to the way learners are responding and engaging with the context. Drama is instrumental as a process or a means to an end and artistic as a tool for inspiring creativity through expression and exploration of ideas. Drama in Education by its nature erases the notion of 'being lectured to death'. It makes teaching and learning process so exciting and interesting especially to young learners who have difficulty in focusing. Drama in education has the ability to increase the power of reflection in constructing knowledge and acquisitions of new skills. It appeals to teaching strategy which promotes cooperation, collaboration, self-control, goal-oriented learning as well as emotional intelligence skills. Simply put, DIE has the power to actively engage the mind, body and soul in realistic situations activities which have proven useful for successful teaching and learning.

Recommendations

It has become necessary to make a few recommendations for future experiments of this nature which would be of immense benefits as a spring board to the researcher and host school. First, the period of experiment could be extended to last a whole term. This will afford researchers enough time to properly assess the effect of experiment on academic achievement. Second, school owners or authorities need to be more flexible and open to creative innovations that would improve teaching and learning. Third, the call for inclusion of drama and dramatic activities in the school curriculum cannot but be emphasized at this point. This would be an avenue to create a conducive and receptive environment for similar experiments especially in the creative arts. Fourth, teachers in training need to be engaged in such researches to adequately prepare them for

ÒPÁÑBÀTA

classroom teaching using drama and its attendant features to improve learning abilities. This approach would influence their classroom experience during their Teaching Practice Exercise where they teach other subjects based on their course combination. Fifth, the introduction of SIWES programme to the three years' academic programme of Theatre Arts students in training in Colleges of Education, would be a step in adequately preparing them for likely challenges in teaching as a profession.

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Drama in Education: Stimulating Learning Preparedness among School Pupils—Nkemdirim O. Adedina

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