

CREATIVITY IN CHILDREN: THE PLACE OF TOYS IN CHILDREN'S THEATRE

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Abstract

Creativity is an inbuilt quality in every human being which can be expressed using practical means. It is also popularly known as talent. It can be developed if one is exposed to the right environment and the right social factors. Early development of this ability is necessary for survival in this modern society. Thus, creative education should be a major concern of both parents, teachers, and the school to groom children who will grow up to become active participants in building society. Enhancing the early acquisition and the development of this ability is important to the intellectual, emotional, and social development of the child. Hence, for an all-round development of an individual child, the learning method, learning process, and learning environment are very important because they help to trigger the intuitive creative skills in a child. So, to achieve this, the child must start learning early in life. Consequently, they will be playfully introduced to innovative skills, creative thinking mindset, problem-solving ability and the ability to make the right choices right from childhood. It will not only broaden their mind, but it will also help them to view life differently with inner strength, confidence, and boldness. To this effect, the qualitative research methodology was adopted with focus on four Primary schools - 2 private schools, 2 public schools, where 100 children were adopted from the Creche classes to primary five and six classes respectively: 10 parents and 20 classroom teachers, making a total of 130 respondents. The research gathered that to stimulate the act of building creative skills, exploring, discovering, and solving problems in children, they must be exposed to playing with toys early in life. Conclusively, children should be introduced to the use of toys that build confidence and take responsibility for their actions even as they play with these toys.

Key Words: Children, Creativity, Learning environment, Theatre, Toys

Introduction and the Concept of Creativity

The concept of creativity is dynamic in nature because it cuts across different phases of issues of life. It revolves around problem findings and problem-solving. Sawyer, R. K., & Henriksen, D. (2024). Thus, achieving these through various methods or means, such as using the individual mental ability to create new ideas to solve existing problems or expand an existing idea, opinions, and the ability to solve existing problems. Creativity as a phenomenon existed in everyday life and activities. Hence, it is not static, but it evolves and can be visible in a process, a person and in a product. It creates an atmosphere of efficiency and effectiveness in the workplace. It is the principal term that enhances critical thinking to solve complex issues and produce added value to make it universally acceptable. Creativity makes life interesting, flexible, and not boring. Every individual is creative, but they are exhibited at different times and seasons depending on when it is needed. Thus, it utilises individual intellectual ability and instincts to achieve a laudable task. Creative skills can be influenced positively or negatively by the environment, society, upbringing, and curiosity tendency. It is the first step to being innovative. Demarin, V., & Derke, F. (2020) see creativity in four ways, namely, it can be deliberate, it can be emotional, it can be cognitive and spontaneous. He further explains that an individual can experience these four phases without being able to identify the method operating at a given time or period.

Theoretical Framework

Piaget's Theory of Cognitive Development

This research is based on Piaget's Theory of Cognitive Development, which was propounded by a Swiss Psychologist named Jean Piaget in 1936 which investigated how children learn and develop cognitive abilities. He focused on the fact that children's aptitude changes, go through alterations and modifications as the children grow. Thus, the mental development of children is not all about learning, thinking, and reading, but also on how the learner develops various abilities and how teachers, parents and society can enhance the building of cognitive abilities. To achieve these cuts across four various distinct stages through which children develop mental model pictures and understand the complex processes that are involved in child growth and development (Siegel, 2020).

Children

A child is a human being who is below the age of 18 years. They are not capable of fending for themselves, so they depend on their parents, guardians or any older person for assistance, protection, and provision. Children totally depend on their parents, guardians, adults, caregivers, within and outside the home, to protect and make decisions on their behalf. Children need a lot of care, pampering and support that gives them the boldness to venture into many things because of an adult's support behind them. At this period in the children's life, they are open to take instructions, love to explore their environment, ask questions and are keen to get answers to all the questions asked. Thus, it helps them to form an opinion that will either be positive/negative. Akpodiete, H. M. (2021). Children are attracted to items that are attractive and items that can be used to play. Parents make sure that their children's emotional health and welfare are paramount in their daily duty. So, they make every effort to take a positive decision on the mental health of their children when necessary. Thus, children are taught how to exhibit a positive sense of value, how to manage pressure and stressful situations, displeasure and how to control their emotions when necessary and overcome uncertainties. Parents and other caregivers are essential resources for children in managing their emotions and behavioural patterns. Parents serve in this capacity by building trust, confidence, love, mutual respect, and friendship in their children; therefore, through parents' actions and inaction, children can read their dispositions to their actions. Hence, such a disposition conveys assertions of parents' approval or disapproval of their children's actions. In the family setting, children are seen as all the younger individuals within the same household who live within the same family, affiliated, or have a relationship that cuts across the nuclear, extended family, relationship, or marital affiliation. Children are not the end of a product of progress, but a means of progress because they are the continuity of the family and the society. Children are one of the vulnerable sections of society. Many children worldwide are growing up in an environment and under a social condition which makes it difficult for them to fulfil their mental and physical endowment. Children are the pillar of the nation; they determine the continuity of the nation. Therefore, the child development demands great care that should not be left to an individual family, but must be viewed in its totality as a national social well-being issue. The family is one of the basic institutions in society whose activities can have a positive/ negative effect on the nation Popenoe, D., (2020). As a primary institution within the society, its basic responsibility is to give childcare and development. These should be a joint effort of both the family and nation, because there are diverse transitional changes in socio-economic issues, traditional issues, the introduction of technology advancement, child neglect, child abuse and child

exploitation, that have introduced some level of constraint, distraction and interference into youth growth and development in this modern age. To achieve stable growth, developing and grooming children that will contribute positively to the society; both parents, interest groups and the government should be concerned with child development and pay attention to several factors that should enhance child upbringing, development, and growth so that children can grow to be positive builders of society.

Creativity in Children

Children are innocently sincere about themselves and the issues around them. So, they often vie to express themselves the way they feel, such expression is shown in their creative ability. Thus, it gives them the freedom to self-expression of themselves openly without inhibition/ maltreatment, which gives children a satisfying and fulfilling emotional trust (Cochran et al., 2022). Creativity is a process to an end but not an end in itself. Children explore this process mostly unconsciously to express their freedom of ideas, views, opinions, or to press on their demands and points to achieve their intentions. This encourages and builds up children's speaking skills, participatory abilities, and self-confidence. Thus, it helps to build a gradual and steady developmental character through being imaginatively creative in approaching issues. Thus, grow up to become flexible, original in making decisions, communicating and expressing. So, allowing children some degree of creative freedom is a means of building children up creatively.

Though creativity is mostly seen as an innate talent. It can also be developed and encouraged. The famous Picasso Quote holds that “every child is an artist, but the problem is how to remain an artist when they grow up”. Creativity is one of the freest forms of self-expression. Hence, there is nothing more satisfying and fulfilling for children than to be able to express themselves openly without negative outrages/judgment against them. Some Children, right from childhood, exhibit some uncommon traits, behavioral patterns, and skills that make them exceptional among their peers. Through these they have an unusual capacity and ability to process information or carry out skills that are not commonly done by their age grades. Though some might not possess such special ability as a child, in the process of development, exposure, learning and studying, they can develop unique creative skills and become creatively endowed. Hence, physical interaction with learning tools such as toys, with inbuilt features and symbols, gives an in-depth understanding of what is learned. Toys are of different sizes and shapes, with features that can be easily interpreted by the learner Ata-Akturk, A., & Sevimli-Celik, S. (2023).

Process of Developing Talents in Children

Curiosity: - Children are curious about things around them. They crave to know more so they ask questions: parents, guardians and teachers should not shut them down. They should be allowed to ask questions even when such questions are not relevant; answers should be given, do not be dismissed or discredited them. In a subtle and mild way, correct wrong ideas and impressions, thereby creating an atmosphere where a child can confidently communicate freely without fidgeting or being afraid.

Avoid Comparison; - don't compare a child with another child. Children are unique in their own right; that a child is not exhibiting the kind of qualities you see in other children does not mean that the child is not creative or that the child is creatively incapacitated. So, comparing children makes one feel inferior, have a damped spirit, and kill morale. Every child should be treated as special and be allowed to grow and develop at their own pace. They should be allowed to make mistakes and be corrected without being termed uncreative. The environment of the child can also make /mar the child's creative instinct, so all a child needs to discover his/her inbuilt capabilities is encouragement Lehl, S., et. al. (2020).

Children should be allowed to practice their Creativity: Due to the nature of children which most of whom are restless, inquisitive, meddlesome, and snoop, they tend to be highly imaginative and ingenious in doing things. Regular practice in this act makes them master the craft. There are many locally and internationally made toys that children need to engage with to build up their creative and imaginative skills. Namely, the building block, alphabet pictures, magnetic tiles, Lincoln logs, camera and phone toys, Legos kits, Knex kits, wooden blocks, wooden train, balloon dolls, car toys, coloring books, painting books etc. These toys cut across ages and sexes.

Admit the Exploration of Childhood Mindset: - Parents and guardians must allow their children and wards to navigate within their space, exhibit and explore their naïve and inexperienced mindset with minimal and friendly control. Many parents instil in their children right from childhood words that can alter a child's mindset. Thus, such languages, words and pronouncements built in the children's subconscious create an elevated inner status of what they were not. Such words as "you are a big girl", "you are a man now", "you are grown", "dress and behave as a mature person", etc. These words have the capacity to enable the child to feel elated and stimulate the child's innate tendencies to act and behave like a grown-up. Thereby depriving the child of gaining childhood experience, and by doing so, building impromptu adulthood tendencies and

their simple nature is eroded. They no longer play with their mates or express themselves as children because of the forceful impression they now have about themselves. Adults should allow children to freely behave as children, mix with other children from diverse cultures and ethnic groups, thereby exhibiting their creative instincts with and among their peers.

Be Positive in Words and Action: - Many parents and teachers are not positive in words or actions towards their children. Thus, it hinders the creative manifestations of children who unconsciously grow up being afraid of exhibiting their inner skills and imagination. Furthermore, always displaying a nagging, irking and displeasure look towards whatever a child does will make the child withdraw. Positive words and actions towards a child will directly and indirectly awaken the creativity in that child. It will boost the child's creative instinct and enhance the boldness to speak and be inventive due to the massive support from parents and guardians.

The Place of Songs and Toys in Children's Theatre

Toys are models, replicas of playing objects that children play with. They are mostly not harmful, but handy, attractive, and what children like. They are of different sizes, shapes, and designs that appeal to children of different ages. Many children learn to use toys right from childhood.

Toys are one of the most effective learning processes for children. Playing with toys is not just a game but an activity that supports children's mental health, helping them start and grow emotional relationships. Additionally, children who play with toys were found to be more easygoing, creative, social, and open to sharing than those who do not play with toys. As children become older and more active, they are introduced to toys that promote more physical play, and that can task their creativity and imagination, such as tricycles or basketball hoops. They are made to be aware of safety concerns, such as wearing a helmet, so that they know that they must be careful as they ride their tricycle and have their helmet on as well. This is also a great age to introduce toys that incorporate cognitive skills, that challenge the minds, bodies, and feelings. The use of toys gives immense benefit to preschoolers, parents, teachers of early childhood education, caregivers, motherless babies' homes, day-care centers, early childhood curriculum planners, because it enables them to take care of children on individual bases, age and be specific to individual needs even as they take care of large numbers of children Kara, N., & Cagiltay, K. (2020).

The Purpose of Using Toys

- ❖ To keep children occupied while the mother is busy doing another assignment.
- ❖ The use of toys helps the child to learn how to be independent early in life.
- ❖ It helps children to get involved in solving problems early in life.
- ❖ It helps build creative skills in children from a tender age.
- ❖ It helps them to discover themselves and to enhance positive self-esteem.
- ❖ It helps them to learn how to study on an individual basis right from childhood.

Children at an early age love playing with toys. To them, anything they can lay their hands on stands as toys. Things they can interact with that can keep them busy, once they are used to such playing objects, it comes to the children. It helps the development of intellect and the mental functioning of a child's brain. Using toys from childhood enhances the thinking, reasoning, and problem-solving abilities in a child Yazgin, E., 2021). Using toys, children can construct and exhibit manners, characters that are both positive/ negative and amazingly react to issues. Children experience rapid brain development in their first year of life. So, they should be exposed to toys that enhance their all-around development because they tend to activate creative and imaginative skills in them. As they lay their hands on different materials, it provides them the opportunity to explore their imaginative thought and other creative skills that can boost their development later in life. Psychologists have proven that children learn well and better when they are allowed to play. In the process of playing, they stretch their brains, develop social relations, and build up language skills. Toys are fundamental to playtime.

In the African traditional setting, many parents do not see toys as important items to purchase, especially modern-day toys. So, from childhood, children from the local setting play with anything they can lay their hands on. They thereby displayed a lot of skills, creativity, and an in-built artistic endowment without being conscious of it. Children of different ages in the village setting, especially those between the ages of 4-8 years, mostly during their playing time, act out different family roles, leadership roles, school roles, religious roles, etc., as they play with one another; the boys act as fathers, boys, and sons. While the girls act as mothers, sisters, daughters, and wives. Toys can also come in the form of a song or singing instruments. Singing can boost a child's personality and influence a child who is shy or change an introvert child's inner expression by making such a child happy, humorous, instil positive reactions and display positive emotions. Children respond to songs no matter the age; for instance, infants respond to lullaby

songs by sleeping. Most kindergarten children learnt their alphabet by singing it. It helps them to learn better and recall easily anywhere and at any time.

Children's Theatre

Children's theatre is a theatre specifically meant for young people. It can be in the form of operas. Puppetry, dance drama, street performance, or any type of performance that can appeal to a young audience. The children's theatre aims to educate, entertain and inculcate and expose children to new skills, ideas and to engage them in critical thinking; boost youngsters' intelligence quotient, hence, they learn more with physical demonstration. Theatre is a safe way to expose children to difficult and complex situations; thus, it provides a possible theatrical experience for the children; that is why different toys are introduced to them at a very young age, for both educational benefits and psychological benefits Alfonso-Benlliure, V., et.al., 2021).

Objectives

- ❖ To show that children's theatre performance can be a vehicle to introduce children to the use of toys from childhood.
- ❖ To show that children's performance is a safe way to discover and develop children's innate abilities.
- ❖ To show that by using toys, children learn well as they are entertained.
- ❖ To show that toys as part of children's performance can introduce children to reading abilities, pronunciation skills and boost their level of concentration.
- ❖ To show that the use of toys can help to build children's imaginative skills, thinking ability and develop their desire to learn as they play and learn.

Methodology

The qualitative research methodology was employed using structured questionnaires and observation methods to collect data. The focus was on four (4) primary schools, 2 from the private sector and 2 from the public sector, with 10 Parents and 20 classroom teachers all involved in the research method.

The population of the study- The study focused on children from the Creche class, three months (3-month-old) to primary five and six, which is (10 years old). Four schools were adopted for the study- two public schools and two private schools for comparison

purposes. Also, twenty teachers were involved in this study, of which ten were from the private schools and ten from the public schools and 10 Parents. This implies that the total number of respondents was 130 from 4) four schools. Thus, from the public schools, the Creche class to the kindergarten class (kg3), five pupils each were selected from each class, making 20 pupils; from primary 1-6, five pupils each were selected from each class, making 30 pupils. Also, from the private schools, from the Creche class to Kg3 classes, 20 pupils were selected; from Primary 1-5, 30 pupils were selected, which was a total of 100 pupils from the private and public schools. Ten teachers (10) from the private and 10 teachers from the public schools were adopted for the research work, making a total of 20 teachers and 10 Parents. Thus, the total respondents were 130 people.

The Questionnaire: A total number of 60 questionnaires were distributed to 60 respondents in this order: 20 teachers, 10 from the private schools and 10 from the public schools. Ten (10) parents- five (5) from the private school and five (5) from the public schools. Thirty (30) pupils, fifteen (15) from the private schools from primary 3-5 and 15 from the public schools from primary 4-6 and the observation of the Creche classes of both private and public schools.

Data Presentation and Analysis

The questionnaire was divided into four sections. Section one was the demographic section, which collated respondents' personal information. Section two was on the pupils; it dealt with information about children and toys by asking these questions. Do you know what toys are? Do you have toys at home? Do you use toys in school? What kind of feelings do you have when you use toys? Do your parents allow you to use toys always? What does the use of toys mean to you? Which of the subjects does your teacher use toys to enhance the explanation?

The third section of the questionnaire was for the schools and the classroom teachers. It was about how the school and the classroom teachers viewed toys. The importance of toys in impacting knowledge and how they have enhanced and boosted teaching. Do you encourage parents to buy some toys to enhance their children academically? The fourth part of the questionnaire was for parents. It was based on the parents' view and acceptance of the use of toys at home. Have you noticed any positive impact of the use of toys on your children academically? Do you agree that toys have come to stay as part of academic teaching aids? Do you encourage your children/wards to use toys at home? What is your impression of toys and their usefulness at home and in school?

From the findings, it was discovered that the public primary schools ran more of the traditional Nursery and primary school system, which is from creche to primary six. While the private primary schools operated the Montessori system, which is from the creche classes to the primary five. This has influenced the choice of students for the questionnaire. In the private schools, pupils were chosen from primary 3-5, while in the public-school pupils were chosen from primary 4-6. It was gathered that most of the pupils in the private schools were children/ wards from educated, enlightened, wealthy and influential households. While in the public schools, pupils were children from semi-educated, poor families, house helpers, and those who could not afford the exuberant school fees of the private primary schools. The research gathered that both the private and the public-school pupils know what toys are and how to use them. Most of the pupils from the private schools have toys at home, while only very few of the public-school pupils have toys at home. The pupils from the private schools use toys in school, as toys were seen as a teaching aid and as part of the Montessori classroom method. While in the public schools, toys were only compulsory for pupils in creche classes to KG3 classes. The other classes were taught through the traditional method, where teachers follow the same lesson format always. Both pupils from the private and public schools agreed that the use of toys makes them happy, because they play as well as learn in a relaxed atmosphere. Those in private school and the few in public schools whose parents could afford the purchase of toys have developed the habit of using toys always. Apart from studying purposes, parents allow their wards/children to use toys when they are busy or highly occupied. In the private schools, toys were introduced into almost all the subjects, also into the classroom beautification and decoration, which is compulsory for a Montessori classroom. Thus, a method where pupils learn in a beautiful environment that showcases what they are learning by having beautiful alphabetical diagrams on the walls of their classroom. This challenges the pupils and puts them on their toys without the teachers compelling them. Due to this factor, they were always ready to learn and pronounce things on their own. Through this regular practice, the pupils develop boldness, self-sufficiency, personal independence, and self-motivation. To the pupils, studying is fun because they learn and play. The public schools practiced the traditional system of education, which is a learning method where the teacher communicates with pupils directly. Hence, the pupils learnt everything they needed to know from their teachers. There is no space for self-discovery by the pupils; they focus on achieving the laid-down curriculum without giving attention to the capacity and interest of the learners. The pupils must give attention, be obedient and cooperate with their teachers. In the traditional teaching method, pupils learn by compulsion and memorize what is taught,

while in the Montessori system. Pupils learn through interacting with the environment, beautiful and appealing sceneries that make learning easy and fun.

In the third section of the questionnaire, which was for the schools and the classroom teachers, it was gathered that the private schools made it compulsory for parents to purchase some basic toys for their children to use at home –alphabetical pronunciation toys, recitation and singing toys, building blocks, puzzles, dolls, and board games. etc. Thus, as the private schools gave prescribed books to parents, they also gave prescribed toys that would assist both parents and children in the process of homework. The private schools see toys as an aid to teaching all subjects. The private schools claimed that the use of toys has enhanced teaching by making the pupils bold, outspoken, be independent in doing homework by themselves with little or no assistance from parents/guardians. This has enhanced the pupils' early understanding of symbols, which is the first step in reading. The private schools employed the use of toys to teach primary one to primary five, which is an examination class for the living certificate.

The fourth part of the questionnaire was for parents. It was gathered that parents with children in private schools have come to accept the use of toys as an academic tool, while parents with children in public schools could not come to terms with the use of toys as an academic aid. Furthermore, both parents from both schools agreed that toys were effective, captivating, and inviting to the pupils in the Creche classes to the KG3 classes. The children do not cry when going to school anymore because of the toys they play with. Both parents also unanimously agreed that the creche to kg3 pupils were academically sound as they start reading and pronounce early, this has enhanced the pupils' early understanding of symbols, which is the first step in reading was attributed to early usage of toys.

Parents with children in private schools agreed that toys have come to stay as a teaching aid. While most parents in public schools see the use of toys in public schools from primary 3-6 as a waste of money. Therefore, the parents from the private schools encourage their children to use toys at home as it also gives the parents freedom to be involved in other activities. From the findings, it was discovered that both public and private primary schools have pupils from Crèche to primary six and primary 5, respectively. Most highly educated and wealthy parents patronize private schools, while the less privileged have their children in public schools. Thus, the public schools have more students than the private schools. Private schools invested in the purchase and usage of toys, as aid for the teaching of the pupils from creche to primary five. The research also gathered that private schools employed the use of performance songs such as “hush

little baby” a song composed of different types of rhymed scheme, alphabet songs - “twinkle, Twinkle Little Star how I Wonder What You Are”, rainbow song- “You Are My Sunshine”. Children were introduced to toys for clapping and dancing from the Creche class. This has helped the schools to discover children who were introverted, extroverted and hyperactive. It was also gathered that as the children play with these toys, they also learn pronunciation and reading, especially with the alphabet toys. The research also gathered that using toys, especially language toys, not only enhances the learning of languages but also increases children's concentration level and reduces their disturbance level. Thus, because of this exposure from childhood, most of the private school pupils read fluently from primary three and can express themselves freely. So, they were creatively sound compared to the public schools where most of the children were timid, shy and lacked self-confidence when relating with visitors.

Conclusion

From the foregoing analysis, the paper gathered that the use of toys enhances the learning process, and introduced children to the creative problem-solving method early in life. It improves the mental health, personal growth of children. In a nutshell, toys should not be seen as resources for occupying children and getting them busy alone, rather it should be seen as an educational aid that must go along with children's learning from childhood. Buying toys for a child is not only a show of love from the Parents to the child, but a means of making a statement about the child's education in a subtle way. In this modern and digitalized age, where the world is a global village, children imbibe more of the negative influences of globalization from childhood. So, introducing children to the use of toys early in life can capture their attention and give them a total focus on their education and imprint in their simple heart hard work as they play with their toys. One of the best and the important investments parents can make is to invest in their children's future, which indirectly invests in the future of society is by introducing them to toys early in life.

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