

Influence of Learner Participation in Creative Activities on Socio-Emotional Development among Early Childhood Development and Education Learners in Bungoma South Sub-County, Kenya

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Abstract- *The early years constitute a critical window for socio-emotional development, and creative activity is widely regarded as one of the principal means through which young children learn to express feeling, regulate behaviour and relate to others. Kenyan research on the early years has nevertheless concentrated on cognitive and academic outcomes, leaving the socio-emotional contribution of creative activity in Early Childhood Development and Education centres comparatively unexamined. This paper reports the first objective of a larger study and examines how learner participation in varied creative activities influences socio-emotional development in Early Childhood Development and Education centres in Bungoma South Sub-County, Kenya. A mixed methods design was adopted. Stratified random sampling was used to select thirty two public and thirty two private centres, and structured questionnaires were administered to sixty four teachers, thirty two from each category. Data were analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences Version 25, with frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations computed for the Likert-scale items. The findings show broad agreement that participation in creative activities strengthens socio-emotional development, with an overall mean of 4.05 on a five-point scale. On emotional expression, 40.6 percent of respondents strongly agreed and 37.5 percent agreed, giving a combined agreement of 78.1 percent against 17.2 percent disagreement. Teachers in private centres recorded consistently higher means than those in public centres, 4.21 against 3.88 overall, and 4.22 against 3.72 on emotional expression. The study concludes that creative activity functions as a mechanism of socio-emotional development rather than as an ornament to the curriculum, and that the public and private differential reflects conditions of implementation rather than differing beliefs about its value.*

Index Terms- *Creative Activities, Early Childhood Development and Education, Emotional Expression, Learner Participation, Socio-Emotional Development.*

I. INTRODUCTION

The early years of a child's life constitute a decisive period for the nurturing of creativity, and the developmental gains available during this window are not readily recovered later [1]. Creative activity in the early years is not confined to artistic production. Play, drawing, music, dance and storytelling are the means through which young children rehearse emotional expression, negotiate relationships with peers and acquire the self-regulatory habits on which later schooling depends.

International evidence supports this position across several activity types. Work on the integration of art and craft into early childhood education identifies it as a pathway to holistic development rather than to artistic skill alone [2], a conclusion consistent with earlier evidence on art education and practical skill acquisition in early childhood settings [3]. Studies of music report positive influence on the physical, cognitive, emotional and social development of young children [4], and research on the development of socio-emotional and creative skills in primary education indicates that structured teacher facilitation strengthens both domains together [5]. Evidence from the Gulf region likewise reports that art education improves children's thinking, emotional wellbeing and school performance, although that work was conducted in a setting materially different from rural and peri-urban Kenya [6].

Kenyan research on early childhood has approached socio-emotional development from a different direction. Attention has been given to the effects of screen exposure on cognitive and socio-emotional development in contemporary childhood [7] and to the emotional development of preschool children in child-

headed households [8]. Both establish that socio-emotional outcomes are shaped by the child's environment, but neither examines creative activity as a means of strengthening those outcomes.

The policy position is unambiguous. The national early childhood policy framework identifies creative activities as important for children in Early Childhood Development and Education [9], and subsequent implementation reporting maintains that emphasis [10]. Competency-Based Education, which is child-centred and inclusive by design, presupposes exactly the kind of active participation that creative activity affords. Strengthening creative activity in Early Childhood Development and Education centres is therefore consistent with declared national policy direction.

What is not established is the empirical relationship in a specific Kenyan setting. Bungoma South Sub-County contains both urban and rural settlement patterns and both public and private provision, which makes it a suitable site for examining how participation in creative activity relates to socio-emotional development and whether that relationship varies by category of centre. This paper reports the first objective of a larger study and examines how learner participation in varied creative activities influences socio-emotional development in Early Childhood Development and Education centres in Bungoma South Sub-County, Kenya.

II. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Many young children in Bungoma South Sub-County may not be receiving sufficient opportunity for creative engagement during the years in which socio-emotional foundations are laid. Where creative activity is treated as a residual use of classroom time rather than as an instructional method, the developmental function it performs is lost, and the loss falls hardest on children whose home circumstances provide few alternative opportunities for guided expressive activity.

The existing evidence base does not resolve the question. Studies of music education establish that early and sustained engagement, supported by high quality teaching and adequate provision for performance, produces durable benefit, but they treat socio-emotional development only in passing. Studies

of drawing establish that expressive activity can alter mood in young children, but they examine a single activity in isolation and do not extend to music, dance or play. Kenyan work has addressed the environmental determinants of socio-emotional development without examining creative activity as a means of intervention. The result is that the socio-emotional contribution of creative activity, taken as a combined repertoire rather than as separate techniques, remains empirically unestablished in this setting.

The consequence is practical as well as scholarly. Teachers, centre managers and county education officials must decide how much curriculum time and how much of a constrained materials budget to commit to creative activity, and they must do so without local evidence on what that commitment yields. This study was therefore designed to establish, in Early Childhood Development and Education centres in Bungoma South Sub-County, how learner participation in varied creative activities influences socio-emotional development, and whether that influence is perceived differently in public and private provision.

III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study was guided by Vygotsky's sociocultural theory and Erikson's psychosocial theory, which together account for both the mechanism and the developmental timing of the relationship under examination.

Vygotsky holds that children learn and develop through social interaction and through the use of cultural tools [11]. Play, storytelling and art are not diversions from learning but the instruments by which it proceeds, since each supplies a structured occasion for interaction with more capable peers and adults and each externalises internal states in a form that can be shared and regulated. On this account, creative activity influences socio-emotional development because it is inherently social and because it gives the child a medium in which emotion can be represented before it can be articulated. The theory therefore predicts that the socio-emotional gains attributed to creative activity will be greatest where the activity is genuinely interactive and adequately scaffolded, and correspondingly weaker where materials are scarce or class sizes prevent teacher mediation.

Erikson locates the same period within the third psychosocial stage, initiative against guilt, spanning approximately ages three to six [12]. Children at this stage seek to take initiative and to explore, and through play and creative activity they learn to make choices, solve problems and acquire confidence. Where that initiative is supported, the developmental outcome is a secure sense of purpose; where it is not, the child may develop guilt and reluctance to attempt new things. The theory therefore identifies the Early Childhood Development and Education years as the period in which the presence or absence of creative opportunity carries the greatest developmental consequence, and it anticipates that outcomes such as emotional expression and relationship formation will be among the first indicators to respond.

Taken together, the two theories frame creative activity as a socially mediated mechanism operating during a developmentally sensitive window. Both informed the construction of the questionnaire items and the interpretation of the findings reported below.

IV. LITERATURE REVIEW

Work on creativity within early childhood curricula has argued that the concept requires clarification at the conceptual level and that the teaching and learning methodologies through which it is pursued warrant closer examination, alongside stronger artistic training in both initial and continuing teacher education [13]. That analysis compared national curriculum guidelines across a group of Ibero-American systems and did not test the relationship empirically in a single setting, nor did it examine socio-emotional development as an outcome. The present study addresses both omissions.

A. Play

Play-based pedagogy has been shown to retain creative capacity in young children and to render the teaching and learning process learner-centred, easing the delivery of content by anchoring it in activity the child has chosen [14]. That work, however, examined play in isolation from the other expressive activities that populate an early years classroom and did not extend its analysis to socio-emotional outcomes. Kenyan work conducted in the present study area found that children who play perform better across curriculum areas including language, music, science

and mathematics [15], but again treated academic attainment rather than socio-emotional development as the outcome of interest.

B. Music and Dance

Evidence on music reports positive influence across the physical, cognitive, emotional and social domains of early development [4]. Kenyan work on children's playground music has documented the evolution of new musical forms through cultural change and has found developmental influence in both traditional and contemporary forms, recommending that musical activity be further developed through accompaniment by a wider range of activities. That recommendation is the direct warrant for treating dance alongside music in the present study rather than as a separate matter.

C. Drawing

Experimental work in which children produced their own drawings and were subsequently asked to copy the drawings of others found that drawing improved mood through distraction rather than through venting. Related evidence indicates that children who draw something positive in order to divert attention from sadness or anger report improved mood relative to children given other instructions, which supports the treatment of drawing as a non-verbal instrument of emotional regulation. The present study extends this line by examining drawing as one element of a combined repertoire rather than as a single technique.

D. Research Gap

Three gaps emerge. First, existing studies examine single activities in isolation, whereas classroom practice deploys play, drawing, music and dance together, and it is the combined repertoire whose influence needs to be established. Second, the outcome variable in most of the available work is academic attainment or general development rather than socio-emotional development specifically. Third, the evidence that does address socio-emotional development in Kenya is concerned with environmental risk factors rather than with creative activity as a means of strengthening outcomes, and the international evidence that does address creative activity was generated in settings whose resource conditions differ materially from those of rural and peri-urban Kenya [6]. The present study addresses all three.

V. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A. Research Design

The study adopted a mixed methods design combining quantitative and qualitative approaches concurrently. The quantitative strand generated measurable data on teachers' assessments of socio-emotional outcomes, while the qualitative strand gathered detailed accounts of classroom experience from teachers and teachers in charge. Combining the two permitted numerical patterns to be interpreted against the classroom circumstances that produced them. The findings reported in this paper derive principally from the quantitative strand.

B. Study Area

The study was conducted in Bungoma South Sub-County, Bungoma County, in western Kenya. The sub-county borders Busia County to the west and south west, Uganda to the north west, Trans Nzoia County to the north east and Kakamega County to the east, and contains the Bungoma central business district together with the Kanduyi, Musikoma and Kibabii areas. It supports a large number of Early Childhood Development and Education centres across both urban and rural settlement, which makes it suitable for examining provision under contrasting conditions.

C. Target Population

The target population comprised 94 public and 120 private Early Childhood Development and Education centres, 12,000 pre-primary two learners attending those centres and 430 teachers supporting their learning and development, giving an aggregate population of 12,644.

D. Sampling Procedure and Sample Size

Centres were divided into non-overlapping strata and a random sample was drawn from each stratum in order to secure representation across groups, increase precision and reduce bias. On the principle that a sample of between ten and thirty percent of the accessible population is adequate for most social science research [17], the study sampled 32 public and 32 private centres, giving 64 centres in total. Sample size was additionally verified using Yamane's formula for finite populations at a margin of error of 0.05 [16], which yielded a required sample of 388 from the

aggregate population of 12,644. The findings reported in this paper derive from the teacher questionnaire, completed by 64 teachers drawn evenly from the two categories of centre, 32 from public and 32 from private provision.

E. Data Collection Instruments

Questionnaires were administered to teachers, whose daily contact with the children placed them in a position to report on developmental change over time. Interview schedules allowed teachers and teachers in charge to elaborate their assessments, and observation schedules were used to record learners in their natural setting during creative activity and peer interaction, capturing spontaneous play, artistic activity and social behaviour. Items bearing on the present objective were presented on a five-point Likert scale.

F. Piloting, Validity and Reliability

The instruments were piloted at Milo Early Childhood Development and Education Centre in Webuye East Sub-County to test clarity, validity and reliability, and feedback from the pilot informed the revision of ambiguous and irrelevant items [18]. Findings from the pilot were excluded from the main study. Content validity was established by aligning the instruments with the study objectives and submitting them to expert review at Kibabii University, and construct validity was strengthened through pre-testing and item refinement [19]. Reliability was assessed through internal consistency using Cronbach's alpha, with a coefficient above 0.7 treated as acceptable [20].

G. Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences Version 25. Descriptive techniques were employed because they summarise respondents' views clearly: frequencies and percentages were computed to show the distribution of responses for each item, and means and standard deviations were computed for the Likert-scale items to establish the overall level of agreement and the variation around it [21], [22]. Qualitative data were grouped into themes bearing on the study objectives. Findings are presented in frequency tables, percentages, mean scores and standard deviations, with each table followed by interpretation relating it to the objective.

H. Ethical Considerations

An authorisation letter was obtained from the Board of Graduate Studies at Kibabii University and a research permit was obtained from the National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation before data collection began. Permission was subsequently sought from education officials and from the administrators of the participating centres. Teachers and teachers in charge were informed about the study and agreed to take part, and parents and guardians gave consent for the participation of their children. Names and personal details were excluded from the record, all activities were age appropriate, participation was voluntary and no participant withdrew during the study period.

VI. RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with statements describing socio-emotional outcomes associated with learner participation in creative activities. Findings are reported separately for public and private centres and then in combination.

A. Emotional Expression

Respondents were asked whether learners who actively participate in creative activities show better emotional expression. In public centres, 71.9 percent either agreed or strongly agreed, against 84.4 percent in private centres. The mean for private centres, 4.22, exceeded that for public centres, 3.72, indicating stronger agreement among teachers in private provision.

Table 1: Learners Who Actively Participate in Creative Activities Show Better Emotional Expression

Response	Public n (%)	Private n (%)
Strongly Disagree	2 (6.3%)	1 (3.1%)
Disagree	5 (15.6%)	3 (9.4%)
Neutral	2 (6.3%)	1 (3.1%)
Agree	14 (43.8%)	10 (31.3%)
Strongly Agree	9 (28.1%)	17 (53.1%)

Response	Public n (%)	Private n (%)
Total	32 (100%)	32 (100%)
Mean Score	3.72	4.22

When responses from both categories were combined, 40.6 percent of respondents strongly agreed and 37.5 percent agreed that creative activities improve emotional expression, giving a combined agreement of 78.1 percent. Only 17.2 percent either disagreed or strongly disagreed and 4.7 percent were neutral.

Table 2: Emotional Expression, Combined Responses

Response	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Disagree	3	4.7
Disagree	8	12.5
Neutral	3	4.7
Agree	24	37.5
Strongly Agree	26	40.6
Total	64	100

B. Building Positive Relationships

Respondents were then asked whether participation in creative activities helps learners build positive relationships with others. Agreement was recorded at 84.4 percent among teachers in public centres. The mean scores of 4.03 for public centres and 4.19 for private centres indicate an overall positive assessment of the contribution of creative activity to learners' interpersonal relationships, giving a combined mean of 4.11 with a standard deviation of 0.71. The finding implies that creative activities furnish occasions on which learners cooperate, communicate and interact effectively with peers.

C. Overall Socio-Emotional Development

Taken together, the two indicators produced an overall mean of 4.05, which corresponds to agreement on the five-point scale and indicates that teachers generally

regarded creative activities as exerting a positive influence on socio-emotional development. Teachers in private centres reported somewhat stronger agreement, at 4.21, than those in public centres, at 3.88. The comparatively low standard deviations indicate that respondents held reasonably consistent views.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics on Socio-Emotional Development

Variable	Public	Private	Overall
Emotional expression	3.72	4.22	3.97
Positive relationships	4.03	4.19	4.11
Overall mean	3.88	4.21	4.05

Standard deviations were 0.84 for emotional expression, 0.71 for positive relationships and 0.78 overall. All three means fall within the range corresponding to agreement.

D. Comparison of Public and Private Centres

The comparative position is set out below. Teachers in private centres recorded higher means on both indicators, and the differential was substantially wider on emotional expression, at 0.50, than on relationship building, at 0.16.

Table 4: Comparative Analysis by Category of Centre

Indicator	Public	Private	Difference
Emotional expression	3.72	4.22	0.50
Positive relationships	4.03	4.19	0.16
Overall mean	3.88	4.21	0.33

The pattern is one of agreement in both categories with a consistent margin in favour of private provision. It is notable that the narrowest gap occurs on relationship building, where public centres recorded the higher

agreement percentage, and the widest on emotional expression, which is the more resource-dependent of the two outcomes in that it requires materials, adult mediation and time for individual attention.

E. Summary of Findings

The findings establish agreement across both categories of centre that learner participation in creative activities strengthens socio-emotional development. The overall mean of 4.05 places the aggregate assessment within the agreement band, combined agreement on emotional expression stood at 78.1 percent against 17.2 percent disagreement, and both constituent indicators returned means above 3.9. Teachers in private centres recorded higher means throughout, with the largest differential on emotional expression.

VII. DISCUSSION

The overall mean of 4.05 supports the theoretical position from which the study proceeded. If learning and development advance through social interaction mediated by cultural tools [11], then activities that are simultaneously expressive and social should register their effects first in precisely the domains measured here, namely emotional expression and relationship formation. The findings are consistent with that expectation, and with evidence that structured facilitation develops socio-emotional and creative capacities in tandem rather than sequentially [5].

The emotional expression result warrants particular attention because it is the outcome on which the two categories of centre diverged most sharply. Drawing and comparable expressive activities allow the child to externalise an internal state in a form that does not depend on vocabulary the child has not yet acquired, which is the mechanism by which mood is altered through distraction. The finding that 78.1 percent of teachers observed better emotional expression among actively participating learners is consistent with that mechanism operating in ordinary classroom conditions rather than only under experimental ones. Erikson's account supplies the developmental reason for the strength of the effect at this age: children in the initiative stage are actively seeking occasions to act and to choose, and creative activity supplies them in a form that carries little penalty for error [12].

The relationship-building finding aligns with the same framework from the social side. Creative activity in an early years classroom is rarely solitary; sharing materials, negotiating roles in symbolic play and coordinating movement in music and dance all require the cooperative behaviours that the indicator measures. The combined mean of 4.11 indicates that teachers observed these behaviours consistently. This extends earlier Kenyan work conducted in the same sub-county, which established that participation improves attainment across curriculum areas [15] but did not examine the socio-emotional route by which some of that improvement may be occurring.

The public and private differential requires careful interpretation. It would be a mistake to read it as evidence that teachers in public centres hold a lower opinion of creative activity, since their means also fall within the agreement band and they recorded higher agreement than their private counterparts on relationship building. The more plausible reading is that the differential reflects conditions of implementation rather than differences of belief. Emotional expression, the indicator on which the gap was widest, is the outcome most dependent on materials and on the teacher's capacity to attend to individual children, and both are more constrained in public provision. On this reading the differential is an artefact of resourcing, and the appropriate response is to address the resourcing rather than the attitudes of the teachers.

Read as a whole, the findings support treating creative activity as an instructional method with a demonstrable developmental function rather than as an optional enrichment of the timetable. That conclusion aligns with the national policy position, which identifies creative activity as important within Early Childhood Development and Education [9], [10], and with the child-centred and inclusive premises of Competency-Based Education. The distance between that policy position and observed classroom conditions is the practical problem the findings identify.

VIII. CONCLUSION

The study establishes that learner participation in varied creative activities exerts a positive influence on socio-emotional development in Early Childhood Development and Education centres in Bungoma

South Sub-County. Teachers in both public and private centres agreed that active participation strengthens emotional expression and assists learners in building positive relationships, with an overall mean of 4.05 on a five-point scale and combined agreement of 78.1 percent on emotional expression.

The influence was reported as stronger in private centres, with an overall mean of 4.21 against 3.88 in public centres and the widest margin recorded on emotional expression. Since agreement was substantial in both categories, and since public centres recorded the higher agreement percentage on relationship building, the differential is best understood as reflecting the conditions under which creative activity is implemented rather than differing assessments of its worth.

The wider conclusion is that creative activity operates as a mechanism of socio-emotional development rather than as an adjunct to the curriculum. Play, drawing, music and dance give young children a medium in which feeling can be represented before it can be articulated and an occasion on which cooperation must be practised. Where that medium and that occasion are withheld, whether through shortage of materials or through pressure of numbers, a developmental function is lost rather than merely an activity foregone.

IX. RECOMMENDATIONS

First, creative activities should be timetabled as a substantive component of instruction in Early Childhood Development and Education centres rather than accommodated in time left over from other work, on the basis that the developmental function they perform is not discharged by any other classroom activity.

Second, the County Government of Bungoma and the Ministry of Education should direct provision towards the materials required for creative activity in public centres, since the widest measured gap between public and private provision occurred on the outcome most dependent on materials and individual attention.

Third, teacher preparation, both initial and continuing, should include practical instruction in the facilitation of play, drawing, music and dance for socio-emotional purposes, so that teachers are equipped to use these activities deliberately rather than incidentally.

Fourth, centre managers should address class size and the organisation of teaching groups where these constrain the individual attention on which emotional expression outcomes depend.

Fifth, further research should test the relationship reported here using direct measures of learner socio-emotional development alongside teacher assessment, should extend the enquiry to additional sub-counties in order to establish generalisability, and should examine whether particular creative activities contribute differentially to specific socio-emotional outcomes.

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