

School Libraries in Enhancing Children's Creativity: An Evidence-Based Assessment from a Developing Country

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Abstract

The study is an assessment of school libraries in enhancing children's creativity from the experience of The Cradle Montessori School, Benin, Edo State, Nigeria. It examines some major activities the school engages in to stimulate and develop the imaginative and creative abilities of the children. Description of these activities was made and the pictorial representation of each of these activities was also presented. The study describes the processes involved in carrying out these activities, lessons learnt by the school children and the practical implications of these activities as it affects their all-round development. Thus, the study provides a template for school libraries in developing countries in stimulating creativity among school children. The study concludes that activities of school libraries open the minds of children to a world of possibilities, while inculcating in them basic life skills for a successful future. Consequently, suggestions were made to spur creative activities in school libraries.

Keywords: *Bookmarking; Creativity; Dress and card making; Games; Puzzle building; School library, Story making craft*

Introduction

Schools are crucial instruments of development and nation building as they provide the basic foundation to education through the promotion of teaching, learning, impartation of cognitive skills and fine-tuning the child's behaviour for the 21st Century requirements. In achieving these objectives, the school library is established to serve as the intellectual hub of the school, stimulating children to acquire knowledge and skills through diverse and simple but innovative ways. According to International Federation of Library Association and Institution (2015), school library is the school's learning space (physical and digital) where reading, inquiry, thinking, imagination and creativity are enhanced for personal, social, cultural and national development. International Federation of Library Association and Institution (2015) opined that such space could be termed school media resource center, library resource center and library learning commons. Thus, the school library is a safe space for the children to build their cognitive, behavioural, creative and critical thinking abilities with the help of trained school library personnel.

The International Federation of Library Association and Institution (2015) emphasised that the school library provides active instructional programme that develops the thinking capabilities of the children. As such, the school library inculcates in the children, inquisitive spirit, higher order thinking and critical analysis skill that prompt creativity which reflects deep knowledge and understanding. Therefore, creativity is a vital obligation of school libraries toward children. According to Sefertzi (2000) cited in Oyewole and Igbinovia (2017), creativity is the generation of new ideas or the recombination of known elements into something new, providing valuable solutions to a problem. By implication, creativity in children will develop in them a productive mindset and a maker-spirit, which seems to be lacking currently among young people. This is because creativity is central to making which

involves experimental and hands-on engagement that focuses on the processing of creating much more than on the end product (Feinstein, DeCillis & Harris, 2016). Thus, school libraries are safe places for students to be creative and become makers while dealing with self, others, environment and tools.

The ability of school libraries to harness or stimulate the creative abilities of children makes them vital instrument to societal development. However, some school libraries in Nigeria have not sufficiently proven mastery on the roles they play as creative hub. The objective of this study, therefore, is to provide a template on how school libraries in developing countries can effectively stimulate children's creativity using evidence-based approach from The Cradle Montessori School, Benin. The study provided a description of the various creative activities (bookmark making, puzzle building, story making craft, games, dress and card making) engaged in by the children, the processes involved, lessons learnt and practical implications of these activities in relation to stimulating creative minds in children.

Bookmark making

A bookmark is a narrow material (card, leather or plastic) placed between the pages of a book to keep-track of specific page(s). To ensure that students have a proper orientation of books, the school library introduced bookmark making every term in other to emphasize book care rules, acquaint the children with possible threat to books and creating solutions to them. Bookmarking is one way we care for books to avoid folding of the pages of a book while reading. Thus, bookmark making is closely tied to safe handling and preservation of books from getting torn or damage easily by the reader or user. In regard to this, bookmarking is essential as it involves proper book keeping and maintenance of books for future uses or references. Thus the bookmark lies flat so they don't cause damage to the book spine and also help readers keep track of where they are reading to prevent dog-earing which invariably prevent lasting damage.



Figure 1: bookmark making

Processes involved:

The children used materials like cardboard papers, glues, scissors, colours, rulers, and pencils in creating a personal bookmark. Cardboard papers are often used because it is an easily accessible material in craft making for children. The cardboard was cut with scissors in a

rectangular shape using a measurement of 4x25cm, then children made their own creative design that are unique to them using colours to beautify their bookmark.

Lessons learnt:

1. The children learnt the need for safe keeping and handling of books. The need for safe keeping and handling of books are important lessons associated with book care rules. Proper handling and safekeeping of books with the aid of a bookmark help the book to remain in an ideal condition and preserve their memory or physical look.
2. It encourages leisure reading and it is a fun way to promote reading culture in children. With the aid of a bookmark, independent reading is being promoted which provides a perfect easy-to-read guideline to help pupils increase reading comprehension and to see reading as a passion not an assignment, knowing that reading is an adventure that reminds the child of good reader strategies. Hence, bookmark usage is a fun way to incorporate reading culture.
3. It helped children to learn about different shapes, colours and how shapes create things. Making their own bookmark using shapes and colours help children to identify different shapes and colours. While reading, children learn colours and shapes at same time which is the foundation of early cognitive and math skills. Therefore, identification of different shapes and colours is established by this activity.
4. They learnt how to care for their books and discourage dog-earing of books. Dog-earing is a major challenge on how we care for our books. The children learnt how to handle books properly by discouraging folding of book page and encouraging the use of bookmark, as dog-earing leads to defacing of a book.
5. It helps children to develop fine motor skills. Children learnt the use of hand-eye coordination which is one of the great tools for the development of a child. Thus it enables children to become more independent and allow children to perform tasks with little or no assistance. Fine motor skills are essential for performing everyday skills which is connected to early reading development.

Practical implications:

1. Bookmarking helps children during and after reading to remind them of specific pages of a book been read. It entails goal setting and keeping track of a reader's progress in a book and allows reader to easily return to where the previous reading session ended.
2. Children who make use of bookmarks often are better in book keeping and handling than those who do not use it often. The more bookmarks are used by children, the greater the chances of longevity of the book.
3. It teaches children to learn mathematical aspect of measurement and shapes. Making of basic shapes using measurement ruler helps children understand mathematical measurement. It educates children on the difference between shapes that enhances their sense of number patterns and shapes which help to build shape vocabulary and offer children a powerful way of communication.
4. Bookmark making enhances children's creativity, fosters team work and interpersonal relation skills as the children are sometimes grouped to brainstorm and create unique bookmarks. Children were able to create their own bookmark using creative critical thinking skill which requires hands on practical and enable them work as a team. Therefore, multiple practices allow for creative freedom by fostering the creation of modern bookmark.

Puzzle building

The Puzzle building is the reinforcement of existing connections between brain cells and the development of critical thinking in children. The building of skeletal system with a skeleton puzzle which involve the arrangement or attaching of different skeletal part of the human body by some group of students was done to encourage team building and to show the importance of team work. The successful arrangement of the skeletal system tends to teach students the names of every bones and the different part these bones can be found in the human body and also help children to work as a team in problem solving.



Figure 2: Puzzle building

Processes involved:

A group of children built a skeletal system with a skeleton puzzle which involves the arrangement or attaching of the different skeletal part of the human body using a flat surface table to puzzle on. Sorting of the skeletal parts were made by children followed by identifying the different human skeletal bone parts from skull to toe and how they connect to each other. Thereafter, the children started solving the puzzle using critical thinking skills and also working as a team.

Lessons learnt:

1. Children learnt fine motor skills and mental concentration by exercising the brain. Precise movement of fingers was adopted by children to get a puzzle piece in the exact right spot which builds their physical, cognitive and emotional skills. In addition, it allows for growth of social skills as they work together and communicate about what fits and what does not.
2. They learnt how to work in a team and become a good team player. Because team work is a core social skill, puzzle building help and encourages children to work as a team and create group synergy that provides an opportunity to practice problem solving skills which deepens their commitment to the group and enables them work in a productive way.

3. They learnt all the names of major bones as they put together the skeleton puzzle. When putting the puzzle piece together, child will be able to learn and identify the names of the different type of bones that best suit while arranging or placing puzzle piece.
4. It helped children to be problem solvers and also promote curiosity in them. When children are grouped together as a team, they learn new ways to solve problems using problem solving skills to share ideas, reveal new ideas and ways of thinking to settle on a solution to accomplish a task.
5. It helps children to practice patience and work steadily until they reach the end of the puzzle. Emotional skills like patience and goal setting is essential in puzzle building because the first goal is to solve the puzzle using series of strategies and patience is actualized, working through the puzzle to ensure it reached the end.

Practical implications:

1. It teaches children to stay focus on what is important in life until they reach their desire goals. Children tend to focus on the task ahead of them using critical analytical skills to achieve their desires goal(s).
2. It teaches children the importance of working as a team and to be better communicators. The opportunist to solve puzzle as a team encourages children learn how to give, take, share, take turns, discover their strengths and settle for a solution that was achieved by the team, with the aid of effective communication.
3. Practical problem-solving skills are inherent in children when dealing with day-to-day activities. Children were stimulated to use problem solving skills by identifying the problem, brainstorm ideas, share ideas to find a solution which can be applied to real world situations.
4. It teaches children to work together in order to embrace different ways of thinking. Since effective communication and working together as a team is key to the completion of a puzzle, pupils work together to complete a puzzle discussing where and how a piece should be placed and why. Pupils also learn how to take turns and share ideas using their own mind to figure out how to solve the puzzle, hence, cooperative work is promoted.
5. It teaches children to be fairly logical, creative thinkers and problem solvers. Puzzles are great way to help the brain of a child function properly, therefore, critical thinking skills, visual perceptual skills and memory are all tested with puzzle. Hence, puzzle helps children to think more logically and develop ways to solve problems.

Story making craft

The school library and media resource centers have implemented storytelling and story making craft in other to promote children's reading culture and acquaint them with books. This develops in children literacy and good listening skills. Consequently, story making craft is periodically carried out by the children using cardboard papers, colours and other creative tools to create characters in stories. This encourages them to be book lovers, enable them write their own stories and bring book characters to life, thereby improving their hands-on and practical skills.

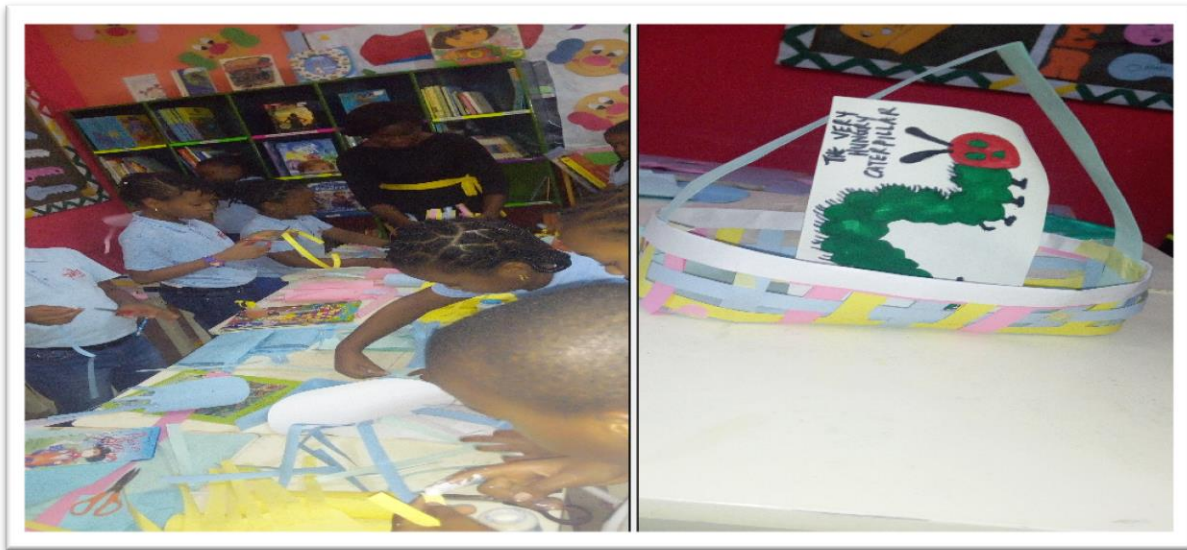


Figure 3: Story making craft

Processes involved:

1. Children used colourful cardboard papers, pencils, glues, and crayons to bring different book characters to life. Children got crafty and cut out the different shapes and size use in creating objects like The Very Hungry Caterpillar in Figure 3; from different colorful cardboard papers.
2. They started placing the shapes on plain square or rectangular cardboard using glue on a flat surface table or work area. Story making craft tends to get children involved in art project that is linked to a story which adds meaning to art.

Lessons learnt:

1. Children learnt how to create 2D shapes in flat geometry. The ability to create shapes is quite rewarding because children's world revolves around shapes. It also help children learn about new shapes, foster creativity in children and the ability to create and identify mathematical shapes.
2. They acquired the ability to critically imagine and translate such imaginations to tangible or physical substances. By engaging children in art and craft, they tend to pursue creative thinking and get opportunity of expressing their ideas in a tangible and meaningful way which brings the imaginative art in them to life.
3. They learnt the importance of art and creativity. Through story making craft, children learn to appreciate the value and importance of creating picture books.
4. It encourages children to think like story tellers. Children learn to act and think like story tellers by working and speaking intellectually and creatively in story telling using pictures drawn or art work created on their own.

Practical implications:

1. It helps children to get acquainted with a branch of mathematics called geometry that study sizes, shapes, positions angle and dimension of things. Creating and identifying shapes by children introduces them to new shapes as well as gain familiarity with various pattern shapes associated with geometry by boosting children academic performances.

2. It inspires and nourishes children's imaginations. Because art is a diverse range of activities that has influence on the imagination of children which inspires creative and innovative thinking. As children become more self-aware, they tend to use their imaginations to become more creative.
3. It sparks up creativity and love for art in children. Creativity and love for art are induced in children because children are allowed to create and design new ideas that further develop into creative thinking inherent in them, knowing that their ideas can easily exist on paper.
4. It kindles children's life-long passion for writing and illustrating their own stories. Creating book characters can be used as a starting point for children in writing and illustrating their own stories especially when they are to explain or share their stories with other children. Hence, imagination and passion is stirred up in them to be creative writers and creating their own book illustrations.

Games

Critical thinking and educative games like scrabble and dictionary skills are introduced as a result of several books read and the discovery of new words by students. This games advocate for the integration of language teaching and learning which tend to expose students to new words, spellings and vocabularies. It also instills in them, life-long learning in the use of languages, helps to foster communication process, healthy competitiveness and confidence among school children.



Figure 4: Games

Processes involved:

1. Children created a board display on scrabble showcasing the importance of book and the feelings they got while reading using cardboard papers, glue, scissors, and colours.
2. The cardboard was cut into squares, the colours were used to make up the letters and writings on the cardboard while the glue was use to paste the created scrabble letters on a board.

Lessons learnt:

1. The children learnt vocabulary building and accurate spellings. Through scrabble and dictionary skills children indubitably learn to improve their vocabulary and word spelling abilities, especially children who are poor at spelling. Children tend to develop their speaking, reading and writing skills. Therefore, with scrabble and dictionary, children hereby reinforce new words to their everyday life.
2. It fosters learning in children through creative plays. Unlike other games, scrabble and dictionary skill is one game that requires critical thinking in children and the best way to teach children is through creative play having children focus on the game by boosting children's creative skills while making learning fun.
3. It encourages cooperation and bonding among children. Bonding teaches children that cooperation and mutual respect are a valued social norm. Scrabble is indeed a fun way to encourage cooperation and bonding among children. When children spend time to play, chat, laugh and collaborate, they learn to share knowledge and develop strategic thinking which is inherent in them.
4. Children learnt how to surround themselves with a winning mindset. Essentially on a word game, winning is highly depended on strategic thinking. Winning over others makes children learn to believe in their ability to win in general which is the first step to succeeding in life, thus children learn to plan ahead of risk.
5. It teaches planning strategies in children. Because children struggle with planning in other to perform a task, scrabble and dictionary skills teach children to imagine, plan steps and execute plans. Hence children learn to plan ahead of task which enable them achieve developmental planning strategy.

Practical implications:

1. It acquaints children with educational board games and bridges the gap between board games and sport games. Where there is lack of adequate space for sport games, educational board games are put in place to exercise and develop the brains of children.
2. It improves daily creativity in children. Playing board games is a powerful way of facilitating creative thinking that enables children conveys ideas to express inner creativity. However, where creativity involves practice, playing board games increases brain function and enhances creativity in children for thinking and application of creative ideas daily.
3. Children however adapt to new rules and work together to achieve a common goal. Board games are good ways to encourage children of different ages to team up and work together. Children adapt to new rules and cooperate while taking turns, build respect and listen to others to achieve a set goal. Thus, children work and navigate team work towards a clear goal.
4. It provides inspirations in children to focus on finishing a task strongly and successfully.
5. It helps children to plan ahead in their day-to-day endeavors. Planning which has a positive effect on games and a basic important step for children to take in order to be successful in their day-to-day activities. Thus, Children acquire skills in planning when playing a board game to put them ahead of their opponent by planning the steps

to perform next move, carry out task and careful planning which empowers their growth.

Dress and card making

The introduction of dress and card making enhances creativity in children. The dress making exposes students to the world of fashion and the natural beauty of clothing, culture and society. On the other hand, card making is an enjoyable exercise which is used to express feelings from a student to another or their relatives, to celebrate them. Both the dress and card making are triggered to boost creativity with the combination of drawing and sewing using paper and glue to help build passion for a career in fashion designing and craft making.



Figure 5: Dress and card making

Process involved:

Children were introduced to creative ideas like dress making (fashion) and card making using colorful cardboards, strawboards, scissors, glue, ruler, and pencil to make beautiful designs of their choice. The cardboard was cut into various sizes, shapes, designs and patterns to make beautiful dresses and cards. The children used glue to attach the shapes, designs and patterns to get their desired results.

Lessons learnt:

1. Children learn entrepreneurial skill outside classroom teaching. Entrepreneurial skill is one of the 21st century skills requirements, as such a vital part of the upbringing of school children.
2. They learnt confidence in their own ideas when working on something new. Children learnt how to think outside the box by developing innovative approaches to achieving set goals.
3. They learnt how to express emotion, love and admiration through creative means.

Practical implications:

1. Encourages entrepreneurial mindset in children. Children were able to create valuable items and develop a certain way of thinking which enables them identify challenges and provide timely solutions.

2. Children become self-confident in executing their own ideas with minimal guidance.
3. Trains the minds of the children towards generating means of livelihood in future.

Conclusion and Suggestions

School libraries and media resource centers are evidently considered as the schools learning and creative hubs where the imaginative and creative abilities of children are developed into becoming creators. One of the objectives of this library and media resource centre is to ensure the overall development of the children. By these creative activities, the children are taught to become life-long learners who can self-learn, unlearn and relearn. These activities open up the children's mind to a world of possibilities where their dreams and goals can be achieved through critical thinking, attention to details, team work, effective communication, understanding, persistence and resilience. Based on this, the following suggestions are made:

1. School libraries should have dedicated time usually between 40 minutes to 1 hour each day to engage children in creativity and creative activities.
2. There should be collaboration between librarians and art teachers to ensure coordination and execution of art projects among the children.
3. Schools should provide designated spaces and tools for libraries and media centers to carry out the various activities that spark up creativity and critical thinking in children.
4. School librarians and teachers should encourage children to read for pleasure in order to trigger their curiosity towards creativity.
5. School owners should give attention to school libraries and media resource centers by providing adequate funding, moral and leadership supports needed to execute activities that ensure the all-round development of the children.

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