

Classroom Drama: A Gateway for Nurturing Cultural Consciousness for Human Development in Children

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17236818>

Article History	Abstract
Original Research Article	<p><i>There are significant contributions from educators and researchers in establishing the role of drama in fostering holistic child development. Increased efforts have also been made to integrate drama fully into the school curriculum for the exploration of the multifaceted importance of drama. Despite milestone achievements, drama in education seems not to have sufficiently bridged the divide between children's learning and the cultural realities of their immediate environments. This study seeks to emphasise the importance of classroom drama to children in preserving narratives for cultural consciousness and personality development. It will also highlight the benefits of children's engagement and participation in classroom drama to promote cultural inclusivity and integration. This study will adopt a qualitative research method that involves participatory action research, planning, acting, and observation, with the ultimate intention of exploring diverse perspectives, dimensions, and experiences through role play, folk songs, and storytelling. Participants between the ages of 9-13 in primary four will be exposed to sessions of classroom drama for interactive learning. The findings of this research are expected to serve as a guide to teachers in schools to employ drama strategies in the classroom to promote cultural awareness. This study will position classroom drama as a viable channel of ensuring that educational practices resonate with the cultural context of the school environment and student experiences. This will further promote cultural integration, acceptance, and social interaction for holistic human development.</i></p> <p>Keywords: Classroom drama, culture, cultural awareness, drama, human development.</p>
Received: 18-09-2025	
Accepted: 28-09-2025	
Published: 30-09-2025	
<p>Copyright © 2025 The Author(s): This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC) which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium for non-commercial use provided the original author and source are credited.</p> <p>Citation: Nkemdirim Olubunmi ADÉDÍNÀ, Ph.D. (Associate Professor). (2025). Classroom Drama: A Gateway for Nurturing Cultural Consciousness for Human Development in Children. UKR Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences (UKRJAHS), volume 1(issue 7), 178-184.</p>	

Introduction

The saying by Shakespeare that the world is a stage and that we are all actors playing a role at a given time after which we leave the stage, stresses the point that acting is living and living is acting. It is therefore impossible to divorce life from acting and vice versa. Man has always employed drama from the earliest times, that is, in the primitive era and early childhood. Hence, drama is life itself; it is an integral part of human existence. Each individual in life has a role to play and this goes on for as long as he or she lives. Different definitions have been given to the word 'drama' by scholars and researchers. Drama could mean an act of presentation through imagination involving all the senses even the sixth. It could also be seen as a genre of literature that encompasses writing and performance. In another light, drama could be defined as a sequence of events meant to be acted. Better still, drama could mean a variety of

activities and event that are acted out essentially through the media of body and voice. It is an expressive vehicle/media of body and soul that occurs as a series of chained events within a specified time.

Children learn by playing. Through play, they build an understanding of self, others, and society. This is a critical stage of children's cognitive development, role playing, creative exploration, collaboration, and imaginative activity (Dalila and Handyaningrum, 2023). Researchers and scholars have continuously evolved methods, strategies and approaches to cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains of learning. The focus of all these is to equip the child learner with all necessary skills that will contribute to the child development and personality development. Child development is crucial in phases of growth of a child. It involves physical, emotional, language learning, cognitive,

and social growth from birth to adulthood. Piaget, Vygotsky, Way, Slade, Cook, and Heathcote have propounded theories on drama and its expected outcomes on children at each stage of development. These have become foundational to fostering healthy growth and learning. These researchers have also established that environmental factors play a vital role in child development. A child's exposure to the culture of his/her culture and that of his/her immediate environment informs his/her perspectives, experience and actions. This explains why drama] is a rallying point and as an adhesive to the child for exposure to methods for productive and responsive citizenship. According to Mauas (2020), "this development happens in a variety of settings (homes, schools, health facilities, community-based centres)" which specifically situates drama in education.

The concept of drama in education originated in the UK. British educator, Harnet Finlay Johnson, pioneered the use of improvisational drama in the classroom in the early 1900s. Other researchers, such as Peter Slade, Brian Way, Dorothy Heathcote, Gavin Bolton, and others, adopted the strategy to promote child-centered learning. Through their research, they "corroborate the notion that drama and performance techniques have the potential to be an effective tool in educating the whole child..." (Water, 2020). This agreement posits drama as process-oriented rather than product-oriented. Through drama in education, an interactive approach is adopted to teaching and learning. This promotes 'inclusive, diversity and social awareness through embodied and contextualized learning (Water, 2020). The drama in education method has multiple benefits to both the teacher and the learner. It is a simple way of reaching students, where other methods fail; it is an engaging process that relies on learners' participation and challenges to create and re-create experiences in daily life. During drama activities, the student's schema or prior knowledge of the subject is activated to really come to a complete understanding. Essentially, when we learn, we are synthesizing. We are merging our prior knowledge with the fresh information and creating something new in our minds (Moore, 2004). More so, it connects learners, thereby encouraging teamwork and cooperation, and collaboration. These achievements have increased the advocacy of drama as a tool for learning in modern society, thereby transforming its original ancient traditions of performance and storytelling. Apart from education, drama enjoys patronage from other disciplines like psychology, sociology, and neurosciences due to its convincing evidence of transformation.

This educational methodology attribute of drama empowers children to explore their identities while cultivating respect for others and enhancing their overall human development.

Furthermore, drama encourages critical reflection and problem-solving, enabling students to navigate complex social dynamics and contribute meaningfully to society. Despite its potential, the implementation of drama in education faces challenges, such as curriculum constraints, inadequate teacher training, and the perception of drama as a secondary subject. These barriers can hinder the effectiveness of drama as a pedagogical tool for cultural consciousness and holistic development. The use of drama as an educational tool has a rich historical background that highlights its role in fostering cultural understanding and emotional development among students. Additionally, controversies surrounding standardised assessment methods often overshadow the qualitative benefits that drama can provide in fostering creativity, communication skills, and emotional resilience. Drama significantly enriches language development and social-emotional learning, and it also nurtures a sense of community among learners from various backgrounds. Educators increasingly advocate for the integration of drama into the curriculum to widen its scope in addressing challenges that limit its potential, to ensure that all students benefit from this enriching educational experience. This collective effort allows for an enriched learning environment where students can engage actively with the content, thereby enhancing their educational experience.

Classroom drama serves as a multifaceted educational tool that significantly contributes to various aspects of children's development. Its benefits lie in areas such as collaboration and teamwork, communication skills, emotional intelligence, cognitive development, and creativity. The significance of classroom drama is in its ability to bridge cultural gaps and promote inclusivity in educational settings. Classroom drama activities also significantly contribute to cognitive development. Research indicates that integrating drama into educational practices can bolster academic and social learning while enhancing problem-solving skills and creative thinking (Moore, 2004). Drama in the classroom is not concerned with producing plays for an audience, nor is it meant for teaching acting and performance skills to children. The goal of classroom drama is to teach the core curricular areas using drama as a medium. Classroom drama allows participants to engage with each other, to develop valuable social skills in young children to learn in a safe and secure space. The engagement is vital in building trust, empathy, and strong relationships.

Paramount among the objectives of this study is the need to create awareness of cultural diversity through an inclusive drama education environment. Educators need to be mindful of the diverse backgrounds of their students and strive to incorporate materials that reflect various cultures

and perspectives by reflecting on traditions. Children need to appreciate cultural differences by participating in cultural experiential learning through classroom drama for biolistic education. Adopting the role-play approach not only ignites curiosity but also develops innovative thinking and artistic expression, which are essential skills in an increasingly complex world. The research addresses the process of classroom drama as pedagogical content to create cultural awareness and renewed consciousness. By incorporating drama into the classroom, educators can inspire a love for learning that extends beyond traditional academic boundaries.

Theoretical Framework

The given research is supported by the Sociocultural Theory of Cognitive Development by Lev Vygotsky who claims that learning and intellectual development in children take place mainly through social interaction in the cultural context. Vygotsky (1978) noted that development is not a solitary process but is a socially mediated process because children learn through interaction with others who are more knowledgeable like their teachers, parents and peers. He claimed that initially, learning can be seen on a social level and it must be internalized on a personal level. This perception is especially important when it comes to classroom drama, in which collaboration, conversation, and experience sharing are the fundamental processes of learning.

Vygotsky emphasized on three important aspects that are relevant to this research, they include social interaction, intellectual adaptation tools, and imaginary play or role play. One, social interaction is an activator of cognitive development. In classroom drama, students are taught to work in groups, cooperate with each other, and get assistance of a teacher and other learners by scaffolding. This type of interaction gives learners the opportunity to co-create meaning, develop empathy, and increase their skills in problem-solving (Dalila and Handyaningrum, 2023). Second, Vygotsky emphasized the role of cultural tools, including language, symbols, arts, and stories, that mediate thinking and give children a way to construct meaning out of their experiences. These tools are incorporated in songs, proverbs, role-plays, and stories in classroom drama that relate learning to the cultural realities of children (Adedina, 2023). Third, imaginative play has been thought to be at the centre of cognitive and social development. In their imagination, children are not only exposed to creativity by role-playing and simulating real-life scenarios but they also acquire knowledge about cultural practices, values and identities, which adds diversity to their overall holistic growth.

The theory of classroom drama is the application of the Vygotsky theory to classroom drama where drama is

emphasized as a pedagogical and cultural process. Guided role play can help children become active participants in the process of knowledge building, as well as to learn about their own cultural background. This differentiates learning in a meaningful context therefore closing the gap between the academic material and the lived cultural experience. More to the point, it promotes inclusivity by certifying the cultural diversity of learners and allowing them to share and negotiate meaning with others (Neelands, 2009).

The sociocultural theory, in a way, describes classroom drama as a transformational learning technique. It offers an environment whereby learning is collaborative, culturally mediated and experiential. Based on the theory of Vygotsky, classroom drama is perceived not merely as an artistic practice, but an effective tool to instill cultural awareness, build cognitive skills and raise empathetic, socially responsible people.

Meaning of Classroom Drama (CD)

Drama in education serves as a critical pedagogical tool that transcends mere entertainment. In education, it catalyzes personal growth and cultural consciousness among children. This approach is grounded in the understanding that drama fosters experiential learning, enabling students to engage with educational content through performance and creative expression. Classroom drama is therefore an offshoot of drama in education. Classroom Drama (CD) is an interactive pedagogical strategy within the classroom in a school setting. It is a performing art form in the classroom where children (learners) are both performers and audience (Hhasu, 2025). Theatrical conventions are not judiciously entrenched; rather, the major focus is on the procedure to achieve set goals within the curriculum. Classroom drama enables learners to merge their imagination with learning content and, importantly, take on the role of a character in guided role play” (Khasu, 2025). In this instance, the teacher as guide develops a structured classroom engagement where children can explore identities, traditions, values, norms, and societal issues through performative exploration (Toole & Dunn, 2002). This approach establishes the educational values of drama as a process and not the product.

Classroom drama is a multi-sensory and collaborative medium that constructively engages children/learners emotionally and intellectually to make learning meaningful (Neelands 2009). Hinged on the socio-cultural theory of Vygotsky, CD fosters interaction, communication, and participation to create a platform to negotiate meaning among learners. CD differs from professional children’s theatre, where major concerns are on school activities and merging theatrical elements during performance. CD for children is a fusion of imagination with learning content where children are guided to act ‘in role’ (Khasu, 2025), it

does not necessarily require a script or a formal stage. The classroom is both a stage and an audience space in a simulated improvisational pedagogical tool. In this study, CD was employed to teach culturally related topics in subjects like creative arts, civics, and social studies to increase knowledge and awareness of cultural practices.

Cultural Empowerment through Classroom Drama

In a multicultural society like Nigeria, CD becomes a tool for cultural empowerment. Children engage with histories, values, norms, and identities through dramatic forms like storytelling, folk songs, role play, improvisations, etc. These practices promote cultural appreciation and enhance intercultural understanding. Children become aware of social realities and gain confidence in expressing cultural experiences. Also, cultural diversities are embraced while inclusion practices are treated as yardstick for peaceful co-existence. CD is a pedagogical approach that empowers children's cultural background and provides a platform for active participation. Most importantly, CD creates a space for children to explore, express, and interrogate cultural narratives (O'Toole & Dunn, 2002). Cultural agency for children to gain confidence to express their cultural identities without bias, inhibitions, or complexes. This process is facilitated in the classroom by combining drama education (performance-based pedagogy and cultural content).. Culturally mediated activities in the classroom provide collaborative and content-rich experiences (Vygotsky, 1978). Children perform improvised stories in their culture, a heritage rich in storytelling, folk songs, proverbs, and language. By so doing, children find a connection with their origin, especially as indigenous cultures are gradually and rapidly being eroded.

CD provides opportunities for children to take on roles as they are exposed to other cultures apart from their own, to create a supportive environment in culturally relevant content. In Nigeria, for example, school-based drama initiatives have reimagined indigenous proverbs and folklore through performance, allowing children to engage creatively with traditional wisdom while addressing contemporary social challenges (Adedina, 2023). This is an indication that "... norms, taboos, history, religious practices, language, dressing codes, foods, dance, methods, greeting, habits, and philosophy are embedded in the cultural formation/structure of the people (Akpodiete, 2021). Therefore, CD is not majorly concerned with teaching theatre skills; rather, it is a channel for children to express themselves, build confidence, explore their imagination, and develop basic skills that will make them productive members of a society (Iroh and Okey, 2024). This sums up the whole essence of CD as a tool for cultural empowerment for children.

The Process of CD

This study was carried out by adopting a qualitative research method involving the researcher and research assistants. The research assistants were a group of five (5) students in training in the Department of Theatre Arts, Adeniran Ogunsanya College of Education, Oto/Ijanikin. The research was executed in the primary school of the institution (AOCOED Staff School). It involved an arm of Basic three (3) pupils during the four (4) weeks experiment, which lasted four weeks. A total of twenty-three (23) learners aged 7-9 were participants. These children were from multicultural societies from the South West and South East of Nigeria, precisely Lagos, Ogun, Oyo, Edo, Abia, and Kwara States. Permission was sought from the school headmaster before embarking on the project, and clinical sessions were approved to be held on Fridays from 12noon-12.40 pm. Four topics were treated at each session during the period. The topics are,

- (i) Greetings in different languages
- (ii) Respect for others
- (iii) Types of food
- (iv) My family

Procedure

The participants were divided into four groups, supervised by one research assistant each as guides and prompts to ensure active involvement. Each session starts with five (5) minutes of warm-up exercises where students are involved in minimal activities such as singing, movement of parts of their bodies, such as raising of hands, swinging of waist, rotating of neck to the left and right, and breathing exercises. Children were restricted from making vigorous movements due to the limited available playing area to prevent falls or injuries. After the exercises, the topic of the day is introduced, and researchers join the children in a ten-minute interrogation of the concept for the day based on the topic. This basically serves as discussion sessions, which will lead to the unrehearsed performances. Here, children share their experiences based on their culture, recreate, and build a storyline around the topic of the day.

Two children from each group take turns to act out the topic based on their cultural background. In some instances short song composed by researchers accompanies these dramatizations. Each topic is addressed from the perspective of the child actor who projects his culture. Fragments of costumes like caps, scarves, caps or wrappers, and props such as cups, plates, and spoons are provided by researchers and kept in a corner of the class. Child participants are free to pick and use any of them while acting. As part of innovation, researchers also performed alongside making a mixture of children's and adult performances. In these situations, researchers take on adult roles while pupils play child roles. The content of the short

drama always reflected aspects of the culture of the performer with which they are familiar. They engage in role play by taking up the traits and characters of adults in real-life situations. They draw from their cultural experiences and exposure to other cultures in the societies they reside. The final stage involves discussion on the dramatization. Questions are raised by researchers to assess the extent of children's familiarity with other cultures apart from their own. For example, they were asked to greet and demonstrate in other languages apart from their own.

Outcome of Classroom Drama

Certainly, play is an essential aspect of learning for the holistic development of a child. The use of CD created an informal environment within the school setting, CD is structured to combine play with intellectual work as pedagogy to make learning easy, children retain more information when presented in a playful manner through CD. CD goes beyond developing children's creative abilities but also enhances mental development for imagination and prompt actions when the situation demands. Implementing lessons through CD give children a sense of belonging, where students feel valued and empowered. The teacher is decentralized while the learner becomes the focus. Children develop empathy through the class ensemble and are culturally responsive.

CD helps children to awaken their senses to activities around them and be able to draw from their cultural experience. Agreeing with Ejiodu (2007) "drama performs numerous functions, principal among which are entertainment and education", CD in this study, serves as a means for the dissemination and propaganda of culture from the perspective of the children. It becomes a mark of identity for the children to imbibe, share, and practice in a formal environment. Engaging children in CD would produce a more conscious and culturally inclined adult.

This research further establishes the benefits of CD for increased cultural understanding, better self-esteem, and a healthier cultural identity (Canon in Gorelov 2022). These can be summed up as shown below. Classroom Drama

- builds cultural competence and strengthens students' ethnic identities
- promotes a sense of safety and belonging
- helps validate and reflect the diversity, identities, and experiences of all students;
- maximizes students' academic achievement by integrating their cultural references in the classroom

Considering the educational value of CD involving children in drama and dramatic activities in the school environment, it increases interaction, exposure and understanding of other cultures. Ekpe and Thompson's view (2019) that drama is a vital and persistent aspect of human experience

utilized as a powerful tool of cultural interaction and communication, is well played out in this study. The images evoked in drama in the classroom influence children's perception of other cultures, a strong indication of appreciating uniqueness, dynamism, and diversity in cultures, without prejudice or bias.

Observations

Despite the immense benefit of CD, there are constraints in its implementation. During CD. First, it was discovered that CD was alien to children during learning; meanwhile, they were accustomed to drama as a performance, especially during school activities. Learners saw CD as a new approach to teaching. Second, the children involved in the study had inhibitions about expressing their ideas through role play. This slowed down the creative process, and researchers had to prompt and suggest ideas when this occurred. Third, the children enjoyed the process of CD. It was less formal and gave room for children's play, which is an important aspect of childhood development. Fourth, most children were not conversant with their cultural backgrounds. When questioned further, it was discovered that their parents were also estranged from their cultures and could not give them accurate answers to their queries. Therefore, it became difficult to transmit culture to their children. Fifth, children found it interesting and intriguing to learn about other cultural practices, and at the same time, they had opportunities to be exposed to their various cultural backgrounds.

Conclusion

This paper has revealed that the classroom drama is not just a co-curricular experience but an intervention pedagogy that promotes cultural awareness and well-rounded development of children. On the basis of Sociocultural Theory of Cognitive Development of Vygotsky, the results show that cognition and learning is socially mediated, and culturally contextual, and children are cognitively and emotionally successful in learning environments where they experience collaborative, imaginative and culturally rich learning. Classroom drama provides the context of social interaction, scaffolding and imaginary play, which are some of the components mentioned by Vygotsky (1978) as playing a central role in child development.

Through role play, storytelling and improvisation, children are able to not only acquire the skill of communicating, solving problems as well as reasoning, but also learn to appreciate their cultural identities and those of others. This conforms to the general objective of an educational process of fostering empathy, inclusivity and social responsibility. Classroom drama supports the gap between the official education and the existing cultural realities in the multicultural environment, including Nigeria, so that

learning is relevant to the backgrounds of students, as well as introducing them to a broad range of perspectives. By so doing, classroom drama serves as a means of cultural tolerance and integration hence providing the children with the instruments they may need to operate in a pluralist society.

The importance of this work is that it is able to rebrand classroom drama as a key component of child-centered education. To the teachers, it provides a viable, interesting, and culturally based means of teaching. To learners, it establishes a comprehensive environment that legitimizes their personalities and triggers a holistic development. Thus, including classroom drama in the educational process is not a mere novelty of pedagogical decision making but a challenge that should be done to raise the next generation of culturally conscious, sensitive, and intellectually empowered citizens.

Recommendations

Integrating Classroom Drama into the National Curriculum

Education policy-makers should make structural use of classroom drama in primary and secondary schools as one of the primary recommendations. Currently, drama has been relegated to the extracurriculars or the occasional cultural events, which limits its influence. The introduction of drama into the learning of other disciplines like social studies, civic education and arts will allow the children to relate learning to the actual cultural experiences in their lives. Such integration has to extend past the occasional role play activity to be a systematic pedagogical approach that fosters learning outcomes. Teachers can facilitate the gap between the cultural knowledge and the academic content by involving students in dramatized storytelling, folk songs, and improvisational play. Moreover, integrating drama into the curriculum will give consistency in the implementation of the same in different schools especially in multicultural environment like Nigeria where promoting unity through cultural knowledge will be crucial. Guidelines should also be given by policymakers on how the classroom drama can be modified to suit various subjects, so as to make it flexible and appropriate to the various learning environments. This model will turn drama into an independent peripheral topic to a central instrument of cultural awareness, creativity, and critical thinking..

Teacher Training and Professional Development in Drama Pedagogy

The major setback to successful application of classroom drama is poor teacher preparation. There are several teachers who are not trained and have no confidence to use drama based pedagogy. This is why it is of the essence to create a tradition of professional development that will

provide teachers with the skills and techniques they may apply in order to incorporate drama in their learning process. They should introduce drama-in-education units at the teacher education institutions that emphasize practical classroom work in terms of role play, improvisation and story telling as a means of developing cultural consciousness. In-service teachers should also be brought together in workshops of continuous development of their skills and acquiring them with innovative strategies in drama. In this way, teachers will feel more confident about using drama as a means of entertainment and as a way of helping students collaborate, understand others, and think. Through investment in teacher training, classroom drama would be delivered in a similar and meaningful way in all schools, and teachers would be capable of adapting drama strategies to local cultural phenomena and the needs of their pupils.

Provision of Resources and Supportive Infrastructure

Implementation of classroom drama requires schools to have the resources and facilitating infrastructure to carry out classroom drama. This also incorporates the delivery of teaching aids like props, costumes, visual materials, and flexible classroom space which may be used in dramatic activities. Although drama does not necessarily involve using complex stages and equipment, the availability of basic materials increases the level of involvement and immersion of children in the cultural storytelling and role play. Schools must also embed certain time slots in the schedule of learning through drama to ensure that it does not get pushed to the back of the queue by the more traditional subjects. Moreover, the government and other interested parties ought to work together in providing financing to the cultural and drama-based programs in schools, and especially in poorer regions. The development of connections with the local cultural organizations, theatre troupes, and artists may also promote the level of the drama in education, presenting students with the real-life practice and other cultural stories. The provision of schools with sufficient resources reflects a concern for holistic education, in which children receive all the advantages of the transformational capabilities of classroom drama.

Encouraging Community and Parental Involvement

The other suggestion is that parents and local communities should actively participate in drama education. Cultural consciousness cannot be developed in a vacuum; it needs the efforts of the family, school and the community at large. Schools would need to come up with schemes in which parents are brought and invited to such an event so that they can participate in storytelling activities, cultural performances or drama classes with their children. It should also make use of the community elders, local artists, and cultural custodians to bring their knowledge, songs and

traditions to the pupils through classroom drama. This collaboration does not only enhance the learning experience of children, but also enhances inter-generational relationships and maintains the native cultural practices. Moreover, the participation of parents increases the confidence of children since they are supported and justified both at home and in schools. Through shared responsibility schools form an ecosystem in which cultural awareness, creativity and wholesome development are fostered together. This cooperation in the long run guarantees that the children absorb the values of a culture as well as learn to be empathic and respectful to other traditions as they grow up to be good human beings in a multicultural society.

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