



Harnessing Creativity Potentials in Learners for Sustainable Personal and National Development in Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper is titled harnessing creative potentials in learners for sustainable personal and national development in Nigeria. The vision statement in the Nigerian policy on education is intended to use education as an instrument to harness and develop to the fullest the potentials of every Nigerian child. Also brought to the fore were the attributes of creative children, the exigency of the moment to identify, harness and develop creative urge and potentials in children. It was also brought to limelight the fact that creativity has become an imperative for sustainable development in the current globally traumatic economy. Issues also highlighted included a difference but the nexus between intelligence and creativity to achieve results. Also considered were issues of what is considered a creative product and how to determine this through a standardized rating scale and experts' subjective assessments. Also considered are how schools can develop creative urge in children; designing classroom space for creativity, encouraging curiosity and divergent thinking amongst others. The paper also looked at the importance of creativity for personal and national sustainable development. Creativity needed to be given adequate attention in the education system. The policy statement had not been matched with action and funding by government at all levels and time. It was concluded that creativity was very critical for a good academic career and self-fulfillment for any individual aspiring higher. It was suggested amongst others that government in collaboration with schools should organise creativity fares for young people to showcase their creative potentials and promote same.

Key words: issues, harnessing, creative potentials, learners, sustainable personal and national development, Nigeria

Introduction

Every child has some ingredients of creativity in him awaiting opportunity for activation. A fulfilled creative instinct leads to self-fulfillment and happiness in the individual. It also enables the individual to contribute his best to the development and unity in the society. When individuals fulfill their creative instincts, it can greatly contribute to national development and unity. The creativity industry is a vast field of human resource potentials with abundant untapped resources.

Creativity shows up in diverse areas of human endeavours, such as teaching, public speaking, creative and artistic writings (including professorial inaugural lectures created out of what

is seemingly nothing worth that consideration), verbal aptitude, story-telling, journalism, speech writing, news casting and reporting, poetry and expression of powerful feelings, sense of wisdom and judgments/law, singing/music and dancing, sporting activities, film acting and production, comedy, painting works, building and architectural designs, confection, interpersonal relationships, weaving, carving, leadership and organizational skills, and many more areas of life.

Nigerian children like their counterparts in the diaspora are embedded with creative urge that needs to be harnessed and developed to achieve their self-fulfillment. The Nigerian National Policy on Education (2004) advocated this with the policy statement that education is to develop the Nigeria child to bring out the best in him and to foster the worth and development of the individual for each individual's sake, and for the general development of the society. Also, that every Nigerian child shall have a right to equal educational opportunities irrespective of any real or imaginary disabilities each according to his or her ability. It also emphasizes among others the learner's self realisation, learner's individual and national efficiency, learner's economic progress, learner's technological progress.

The philosophy essentially is to develop the child's potentials to the optimal. A seemingly abnormal child may possess one form of intelligence or the other that could be developed into a creative act or product. According to Mangal (2019), in a democratic setting like ours (let us say Nigeria), it is not only the geniuses who are needed to create, manifest and produce. Others, whether mediocre or below average, are also required to think constructively and creatively.

Creativity has become key for survival in the recent traumatic global economy, particularly Nigeria. It is unarguable that creative thinking adds value to human existence, therefore creative thinking has become imperative for today sustainable living. In view of this the school system is a good ground to harness, stimulate and develop these creative potentials in the learners.

According to Iheanacho (2021), most psychologists agree that creativity is the ability to generate ideas that are novel, and provide innovative solutions. These are products that are new and unusual as well as being appropriate in context, and valued by other people. Creativity is an act and product of reasoning that defies existing theories, status quo, "traditional" rules, procedures and practices, with evidence of added value or solution to life issues of the moment. According to Morr

(2018), creativity is the ability to transcend traditional ways of thinking or acting, and to develop new and original ideas, methods or objects.

According to Farnworth (2016, p. 10), creativity is “The strange partnership between a human being’s labour and the mystery of inspiration.” Farnworth stressed that creativity is “The ability to connect the seemingly unconnected and meld existing knowledge into new insight about some element of how the world works.”

Many children carry in them creative urges that need motivation and reinforcement to harness. Many Nigerian children in and out of schools have exhibited unique talents and abilities for creativity, but are wasting away. The hindrances to harnessing and developing these creative potentials in the Nigerian children range through poor teaching and learning environments, lack of facilities and other resources, lack of knowledgeable teachers, poor budget provisions for education, lack of political will and apathy on the part of leaders for intellectual assets, diverse forms of sentiments by people in control of power and funds, and many more reasons.

According to Braaten-Hagger (2021), the world is changing so rapidly now that just learning a specific skill set and following it exactly would not get us so far. What prepares students for life beyond the classroom is learning how to be more creative, which includes flexibility in perception and execution of tasks. Schools have started acknowledging the importance of creativity in classrooms. Courses in creativity are now provided by academia because it is now common knowledge that only creativity can help students succeed in the 21st century. Braaten-Hagger noted that creativity in all of its form should be embraced by educators if they want to nurture happy, well-balanced students. The right kind of thinkers for future generations can be cultivated only through this method. Braaten-Hagger advocated that the principal goal of education should be to create people who are capable of doing new things, not simply repeating what other generations have done.

In the words of Albert Einstein, “It is the supreme art of the teacher to awaken joy in creative expression and knowledge” (Braaten-Hagger, 2021, p.15). According to Landry (2017),

organizations today operate in a highly competitive global environment, making creativity crucial. Creativity is what fuels big ideas, challenges employees' way of thinking, and opens the door to new business opportunities.

The benefits of creativity to individuals who accomplish a good feat in their fields are enormous. These benefits include but not limited to the followings: self-fulfillment, self-expression, stress relief, social connectedness, increased problem-solving skills, the individual has commercial value, joy of accomplishment, increases the individual's confidence to retry after failure.

The Nigerian child has found himself in-between the nets of policy and reality. The education system has failed abysmally to harness the potentials of the child according to their individual differences and endowments. The Nigerian education system has lumped Nigerian children together under test of aptitudes. The education system has prioritised the needs of the system rather than that of the child, thereby demanding the child to meet the needs of the school rather than the school meeting the needs of the child. The Nigerian child has always been in battle with all the antagonising forces to maximise his potentials to survive in the traumatic economy. Bringing out the creative urge and potentials in the Nigerian child has become very imperative.

Is creativity independent of intelligence?

Creativity results in a product or idea that impacts or provides solution to a problem of the moment. A product or idea cannot be certified creative when it has not addressed any exigency. Creativity is therefore a product of intelligence. Intelligence is the cognitive ability to address a problem of the moment. There cannot be creativity without intelligence. Creativity and intelligence are inseparable, both have their roots in cognition. Creativity and intelligence overlap. Iheanacho (2021) argued that creativity is not the same as intelligence, while intelligence requires convergent thinking (towards same direction), creativity requires divergent thinking (towards different directions).

Wilson (2018) explained that creativity and intelligence are distinct but have many intersecting features. For example, both demonstrate problem solving skills and the ability to take action

towards goals. Wilson (2018) also noted that some research has shown that top scores on IQ test are not top scores in test for creativity, suggesting that the two are distinct qualities. Subsequent research, however, has failed to replicate these results, leading most in the field to conclude that there likely is at least some association between the two.

According to Shrestha (2017), the Triarchic theory of intelligence by Robert Sternberg (1980) sees human intelligence in terms of distinct components rather than a single ability. These are analytic intelligence, creative intelligence, and practical intelligence. Analytic ability is said to be closely aligned with academic problem solving and computations. It involves the ability to analyse, evaluate, judge, compare and contrast. Creative intelligence is characterised by imagining solution to problems or situations. It involves finding a novel solution to an unexpected problem, or producing a beautiful work of art or a well-developed story. Practical intelligence implies finding solutions to issues of one's everyday life by applying knowledge based on your experiences and common sense. This involves people applying their abilities to the kinds of problems that confront them in daily life, such as on the job or in the home.

Identifying Creative Children in the Classroom

Sensitive teachers can identify learners with unique creative potentials under their care and watch. They exhibit some form of behavioural characteristics that might either be interesting or offensive to keen observers and peers. Mangal (2019) has identified the personality and behavioural characteristics of creative children to include but not limited to the following:

1. Demonstration of originality in ideas and action.
2. Being more adaptable as well as adventurous
3. Possessing good memory and broad knowledge background
4. Possessing high degree of keenness, attentiveness, alertness and power of concentration.
5. They are very curious about nature
6. They Possess little tolerance for boredom but greater for ambiguity and discomfort
7. They Possess foresightedness in abundance

8. They have the capacity to take independent decisions
9. They show interest in vague and ambiguous ideas
10. Enjoy a reputation of having strange and silly ideas
11. Show preferences to complexity, incompleteness, asymmetry and open mindedness
12. Possessing a high degree of sensitivity towards problems
13. Expressing ideas as fluently as possible
14. Showing flexibility in thinking, feeling and doing behaviour
15. Demonstrating the ability to transfer learning from one situation to another
16. Demonstrating rich imagination characterized as “creative imagination”
17. Divergent and diversified in thinking that is convergent and stereotyped
18. Possessing ability to elaborate
19. Not frightened by the unknown
20. Welcome novelty of designs or new solution to a problem
21. Demonstrate the ability to experience self as creative and originator of one’s act and takes pride in one’s own creation
22. Present themselves for use and employment in creative purposes.
23. Possessing high aesthetic values and good aesthetic judgment
24. Possessing high degree of feeling of self-respect and self-discipline, sensitive and intolerant towards injustice
25. Demonstrating human playfulness, lack of rigidity and relaxation in his behaviour and products
26. Always alive to obligations
27. Possessing ability to accept tentativeness and ability to tolerate and integrate the opposite
28. Having a richer fantasy life and greater involvement in daydreaming
29. Showing different brain patterns than the less creative
30. Paying respect to others’ opinions and welcomes disagreement to his own suggestion

31. Always found to be more spontaneous and expressive (Mangal, 2019, pp.312 - 213).

According to Daniels and Peters (2019), creative people tend to demonstrate or possess the following traits:

Awareness of creativity: This implies that creative people are most often thinking about possibilities and noticing creativity in their environments. Their inclination toward this type of thinking allows more opportunities for creative ideas to incubate, develop, and reach expression.

Imagination- Creativity often involves fantasizing, daydreaming and other imaginative behaviours. This involves deliberate forming of mental imagery.

Daydreaming – While in this state of seeming soul-travelling, thoughts are surfacing and connecting in ways that may lead to creativity.

Persistence: Creative children persist on the task until they satisfy their desires which may lead them to a creative product.

Curiosity – Creative children are curious. They want to know and understand many things. They ask many questions to enable them understand things.

Independence – Creative children do things differently and have the willingness to go against the crowd.

Artistic interest – Creative children have interest in art work and beautiful things. They enjoy and value the sense of beauty more than the commercial reward.

Need for privacy and alone time – Creative children create more time to be away from the public and distractions. They may enjoy being alone many times.

Perception – Creative child seem to have more lightened perception-enhanced experiencing and awareness of the five senses. This may be described as insight or intuition.

Open-mindedness – This is the quality of seeing things without bias. The person sees and interpret things without altering or manipulating it for personal interest.

Non-Bias Assessment and Determining Creativity

It is very important to arrive at a non-bias assessment if learners' products or ideas are actually worthwhile to be certified as being creative. There had been debates on how an individual, idea, or a product could be certified as being creative. However, some good level of consensus has been reached. These include:

1. **Rating scales:** Horn and Salvendy (2006) noted that the first major type utilizes rating scales to score different dimensions or criteria of the creative nature of product. The rating scales are generally anchored with semantic pairs or level-based (Low-high) for each construct of creativity. The creative product semantic scale (CPSS) developed by Besemer and O'Quin (1986) measures product creativity based on three dimensions of creative analysis matrix: novelty, resolution, elaboration and synthesis.
2. **Subjective assessments:** According to Horn and Salvendy, in addition to rating scales, researchers have tested other approaches to measure the creativity of products. The Consensual Assessment Technique (CAT) developed by Amabile (1982) takes another method of capturing product creativity. This method is based on consensual definition of creativity, which claims that a product is creative to the degree in which observers agree that it is creative. Expert judges rate products (produced for the evaluation) relative to one another with independently selected dimensions. The judges are asked to report creativity scores on 5 point Likert scale for each dimensions selected as well as other items such as technical goodness. Inter-raters' consensus is then arrived at to determine the creativity of the product.
3. **Consumer or social impact of product:** A product can be certified creative if consumers or the society agree that it is an improvement on what used to be, or it had no precedence. For example, the global community gave omnibus acknowledgements to the fact that the GSM phone and communication system is a landmark creative improvement on the earlier landline telecom and similar forms of communication systems.
4. **Test and None-test devices:** Mangal (2019) identified ways of assessing creativity to be Test and None-test devices. According to Mangal, creativity test devices available include:

Minnesota test of creative thinking, Guilford's Divergent Thinking Instrument, Remote Associate Test, Wallach and Kogan Creativity Instrument, Saxena's Test of Creativity, and many more. Non-test devices include: observation, interview, rating scale, personality inventory, check-list, and so on.

How Schools can Develop Creative Potentials in Children

Many relevant approaches have been proposed for developing, motivating and reinforcing creativity in children. A few would be considered here.

Cox (2017) identified some ways to promote creativity to include:

Designing classroom space for creativity: This implies schools and teachers designate space for exploration and creative thinking. Some schools call this "Nature's corner" or "thinking corner" or "think tank". This is a place in the classroom where students go to think, explore and discuss ideas with their classmates.

Encourage curiosity: This implies discovering the creative passion of learners and encouraging them to look deeper. For example, if the teacher discovers the student is good at story telling or writing, the student should be encouraged to read more story books or novels.

Use divergent thinking: Cox noted that our students tend to use convergent thinking, which means they answer basic questions that do not requires any creativity. Divergent thinking requires children to be creative. Make children to do a lot of brainstorming, encourage them to think differently and explore different perspectives, and the teacher helps the students make connections to their ideas. Teachers should design lessons using both convergent and divergent thinking.

The teacher should also apply the concept of Metaphysics and Intuition as advocated in philosophy of Education. Metaphysics advocates training the learners to think abstractly beyond the physical. Intuition involves training the individual to take a mind's journey beyond the physical realm and connecting the unconnected to see how the world or things can work. Metaphysics and Intuition are the mother of creativity, scientific inventions and discoveries.

Teaching creative skills, creative and analytic thinking: Students should be taught such skills as imagination, collaboration with peers and self-motivation. All these are a pathway to creativity. Creative persons are field independent (FI), they see beyond the whole, or beyond and ordinary non-creative individuals. Creative thinking is the ability to conceive new and innovative ideas by breaking from the status quo (already established thoughts, rules, theories or procedures). It involves putting things together in new and imaginative ways. It is also referred to as “thinking outside the box”. Analytic thinking refers to the ability to separate a whole into its basic components in order to examine their relationships. It involves thinking in a logical, step-by-step manner to break down a larger system of information into its parts.

Using a creativity model: According to Clifford (2012), the Osborne-Parnes model is one of the oldest and widely accepted models. It is often used in education and business to promote creativity. It consists of six steps that each involves a divergent thinking pattern to challenge ideas, and then convergent thinking to narrow down exploration. The steps are:

Mess finding – identify a goal or objective, fact finding – gathering data, problem finding – clarifying the problem, idea finding – gathering ideas, solution finding – strengthening and evaluation ideas, acceptance of finding – plan of action for implementing ideas.

Give students time to ask questions: Clifford (2012) recorded that organizations such as CCE (creativity, culture, Education) suggests teachers incorporate opportunities for students to ask questions. Intentionally designed lessons that allow for wondering and exploration. Learners are given opportunities to ask questions in diverse areas as they agitate their minds to find satisfactory answers to them, to enable them act upon the next step.

Incorporation and integration of art, music, culture in school curriculum: According to Clifford, a recent report prepared for the European commission suggested that society is enriched by culture-based activities. A critical observation of our various society and cultures provides creative ideas for students. School curriculum should also incorporate entrepreneurship where learners can discover and develop their innate potentials for future survival.

Use project method: Teachers should give learners a particular project to accomplish, or that would lead them into further discoveries. Teachers should also ask learners to come up with any project or concept that showcases their uniqueness and originality. Obviously, some learners are very likely to do unimaginable things, or at least demonstrate the creative urge awaiting motivation.

Reward creative efforts: Apply the classical or the instrumental conditioning techniques and reward or reinforce every successive effort for creativity.

Some ways advocated by Mangal (2019) that can also help in developing and promoting creativity in children include:

Freedom to respond: Children should be allowed the adequate freedom to respond to situations and come up with many ideas and solutions to a problem.

Give opportunity for ego expression: children should be given opportunity to derive satisfaction from what they feel they have invented or discovered. This will further boost their creative abilities.

Proper arrangement of the school curriculum: the curriculum should be organized in a way that would foster creativity in learners.

Brainstorming: Children can be made to sit in group to find solutions to problems through brainstorming without inhibition from any angle.

Reform in the evaluation system: Our approach to learners' evaluation which is examination-passing conscious should be reviewed to rate learners on creative abilities.

Remove feelings of fear: Teachers should try to eliminate the fear of failure in trying out ideas in children.

Encourage originality and flexibility: Teachers should discourage children copying verbatim, rote-memorisation, passive reception and similar ways of learning, but should encourage active participation, divergent thinking and originality.

Creativity as Key to Sustainable Personal and National Development

Developing creativity in the Nigerian child is a gateway to personal and societal security. It preoccupies their minds with more curious and adventurous thoughts for creativity. Achievements

in creative works gives the individual a sense of joy, self-fulfillment, boosts self-esteem and ego, and diverts negative thoughts. Achieving feats in creativity brings financial benefits, popularity, and gives virtually no room for antisocial thoughts and activities. Creativity of any form is used to promote peace, love and oneness in the society. Creative people use creative expressions to mirror phenomena in the society. Most of them reflect and talk against societal ills like injustices, sentiments, brutality in the society, war, killings, and many forms of human right abuses that precipitate and brew insecurity in any society and as experienced currently in Nigeria.

Cropley (2006) sees creativity as a servant of the society. Cropley noted that in the ancient world there was interest in creativity as a socially useful phenomenon. Creativity is a resource that increases physical wellbeing and financial prosperity, and makes the nation strong and safe. Further, Cropley sees creativity as fostering healthy psychological adjustment, tolerance and openness in a society. Also, from the moral point of view, creativity helps the society to avoid bigotry, intolerance and similar negative ways of viewing the world, for if they view the world with bias then their acclaimed works would make no impact.

Creative people, not lending themselves to insecurity in the society is on its own a plus to national development. Creative individuals through songs, poetry, arts works have contributed to the museums and other Arts Galleries that form the Tourism Industry for Nigeria. It is no doubt that this industry has been a unifying factor and revenue generating venture to Nigeria. Creative individuals can easily generate solutions to problems, they can offer a variety of options to a particular problem. They can easily adjust and adapt to new situations. They can easily convert opportunities to asset, and can be very good in advertisements and marketing, and can promote the image of the society.

Conclusions

Creativity is an essential ingredient for a good academic career and self fulfilment for any individual aspiring higher in life. Creativity has not been given adequate attention in the Nigeria education system to really harness and utilise the hidden potentials in the Nigerian children. The

policy statements in the Nigerian policy on Education for harnessing and developing the potentials in the Nigerian child has not been matched with action and funding by the government at all levels and times. Most schools and teachers have equally not done much to motivate learners to develop their creative instincts and potentials.

Recommendations for policy directions

Based on the foregoing, the follows suggestions are made:

Teachers and school authorities should make it a point to identify creative children in their classes and the school in general. Government in collaboration with schools should organise creativity exhibition fares for young people to showcase their creativity, and should be well motivated and empowered. Parents should watch out for creativity potentials and instincts in their children to catch them young. They should also encourage them in that direction instead of forcing them against their interest. Creativity should be highly promoted in the school, with special syllabus and teachers.

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