

Social Studies Teachers' Interpretations and Opinions of Creativity Skills Implementation in Rivers State, Nigeria Classrooms

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Abstract: The purpose of this study was among other things to explore how creativity skills are being implemented in Social Studies classrooms. The study was conducted to explore teachers' opinions, beliefs, and experiences through interviews, classroom observation and questionnaires to reveal perceptions, opinions and implementation of creativity in Social Studies classroom. study. Four research questions guided the study and descriptive survey design was adopted. All the 39 teachers teaching Social Studies and Civic Education from the total population of 686 teachers from the 15 secondary schools in Port Harcourt Metropolis participated in the study. A structured questionnaire tagged; "Teachers Opinion on creativity skills in the classroom" was used to collect data for the study with a reliability index of 0.89, obtained using Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficient Formular (r) The instrument was properly validated using face and content validation method. Percentages were used to answer the research questions. Some findings that emerged from the study are; all the teachers believe that creativity is essential in Social Studies education and they are excited to promote it in their classrooms, they encountered some obstacle when implementing creativity skills on their students such as unavailability of space, the author among other things recommended that teachers should be given every support needed to help them practice and implement creativity skills in their classrooms.

Keywords: Social Studies teachers, Creativity, Opinion and Implementation.

1. INTRODUCTION

The most competent model for consolidating the social domain of knowledge and skills is through children's intimate experiences at home, school, and in the community in which they reside. Social Studies is an important aspect of children's development and education, as well as their social responsibilities, socialization and social skills. According to Kostelnik, Soderman, and Whiren, (2011), It is about children exploring people's interactions in and with their social and physical environments, now and in the past, which is also fundamental for a democratic society, which builds upon citizenship, encompassing the embracement of democratic values among other things. Additionally, Social Studies is the study of man in their environment including the concepts, skills, and attitudes which are established to help them become social beings and to understand the complex world (Mayesky, 2009).

Social Studies is an integrated subject and its topics are drawn from theoretical ideas from Anthropology, Sociology, History, Political Science, Geography, Economics, Psychology and the Sciences. These themes depending on the level of the students are explored through playing, personal interactions, literacy and project-based learning, collection and analysis of data, and report presentation beginning with the study of self, family, and community. As observed by Lackaff and Mindes, (2013), these themes are expanded to include local and national History, Economics, Political Science, and Geography to provide meaningful contents that help prepare the students as lifelong learners. Respecting diversity, functional contents, process skills, intrinsic motivation and cross-curricular integration to function as young "social scientists" according to Maxim (1999) are the major components of dynamic Social Studies.

Social Studies classes are supposed to help prepare children with competencies in the “three Rs” as well as to help them become active citizens, because of this they must be helped to acquire the knowledge, skills, and civic ideals essential to become active participants in this 21st century. Zarillo, (2012) pointed out the three categories of 21st skills as; 1. *learning and innovation skills*, this according to him includes, creativity and innovation, critical thinking, communication and collaboration, 2. *information, media and technology skills*, which include, information literacy, media literacy, knowledge, communication and technology ICT literacy, 3. *life and career skills*, and this includes, flexibility, adaptability, initiative and self direction, social and cross-cultural skills, productivity and accountability, leadership and responsibility. (Zarillo, 2012)

All the twelve of the 21st century skills are necessary to teach but it is observed that the 4Cs (Critical Thinking, Creativity, Communication and Collaboration) are always considered most Important. As a Social Studies teacher It is indisputable that you will need to teach 21st century skills as part of your curriculum. But it is also very obvious that any effort to promote creativity in Social Studies will not yield positive results unless teachers understand what it is, why it is important, and the teaching methodology in the classroom.

Creativity was defined by The National Advisory Committee on Creative and Cultural Education as an imaginative activity fashioned to build outcomes that are original and of value which has a significant impact on children’s total development, such as social, personal, and intellectual, and enhances the students’ preparation for the future.

Creativity cultivates and boosts human activity in all areas, and draws from all areas of human intelligence (Loveless, 2015). It encourages students to engage more fully in the learning process and enables them discover additional meanings in their work, which results in expanded memory of knowledge in the classroom environment (Kirkendall, & Krishen, 2016). Creativity is the practice of thinking outside the box. It enables students to embrace their inner strength, become stimulated and willing to share that creativity with others.

Encouraged by the constructivist education approach Social Studies curriculum stressed creative thinking skills with stages and behaviors such as ingenuity and being unique, creating new ideas and the originality, creating extreme and unique connections, using feelings, intuition, and devotion actively, taking risks and facing challenges (Kabapinar, 2007)

Thus, there is a research vacuum regarding the extent of the implementations and practice of creativity in Social Studies classrooms and how Social Studies teachers promote creativity in their classrooms.

2. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study therefore, was to explore how creativity skills are being implemented in Social Studies classrooms. The study will specifically, investigate teachers’ opinions on creativity and teachers’ implementations of creativity in the Social Studies classrooms and factors militating against fostering of creativity skills.

3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research questions guided the study;

- (1) How do teachers understand and define creativity in a Social Studies classroom?
- (2) How do teachers practice creativity in a Social Studies classroom?
- (3) What factors affect teachers’ ability to foster creative thinking for Social Studies?
- (4) What are the teachers’ opinions on how creativity skills can be fostered in the classroom?

4. METHODOLOGY

Descriptive survey design was used for this study which sought to among other things explore how creativity skills are being implemented in Social Studies classrooms. The study was conducted to explore teachers’ opinions, beliefs, and experiences through interviews, classroom observation and questionnaires to reveal perceptions, opinions and implementation of creativity in Social Studies

classroom. The population of the study consists of the 39 Social Studies teachers in the 15 secondary schools in Port Harcourt metropolis. Interviews and a questionnaire titled “**Teachers Opinion on creativity skills in the classroom**” was used to collect data for the study. It was designed by the researcher. It had two sections, A and B. Section A was designed to cover demographic variables such as; sex, educational qualification and specialization, years of experience, name of schools, and so on, while section B was designed to determine their perception and implementation strategies. The researcher validated the questionnaire using face and content validity. The Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) was applied to determine the measure of accurate consistency of the questionnaire which gave a coefficient of 0.78. The researcher with the help of her colleagues and her students on Teaching Practice Exercise distributed the questionnaire to the respondents but only the researcher and her colleagues conducted the interviews. A total of 39 questionnaires were distributed, 33 was returned but only 29 were filled correctly.

Coding was conducted after each interview, differences and similarities were identified in the codes of existing classifications. Codes were categorized in their emergent classes which were examined for interpretation and understanding. The results are below.

RQ1. How do Teachers Understand and Define Creativity in A Social Studies Classroom?

Definition of the Creativity by Social Studies Teachers

All of the 29 teacher participants (100%) stated the significance of creativity for students to have deeper knowledge and better Social Studies outcomes.

Many of them (27) emphasized the unique solutions and ideas for the quantity of strategies students might generate.

These teachers identified creativity in Social Studies through problems in social life and events, having various perspectives for the society to be an active future citizen, conflicts, dilemmas for thinking divergently, and creating innovation for the community and social life. Some of the examples of their definitions and understanding of creativity in Social Studies are below;

- a. Creativity in Social Studies means multiple ways of solving a social problem and thinking of a variety of approaches
- b. Approaching a problem from various perspectives.
- c. Creativity is fundamental to Social Studies.
- d. We need to find solution to daily life problems in an unusual way.
- e. Creativity in Social Studies is to find an unusual thing to advance the society.

RQ2. How do Teachers Practice Creativity in their Classrooms?

Based on the interviews and classroom observations, the strategies they use to promote creativity in their classrooms can be organized under the following headings:

- 1) AI-inclusive educational environment: (curriculum, tools, and materials, physical and social condition);
- 2) Nurturing classroom environment with freedom of speech and expression of mind in the classroom, and encouragement in different ways.
- 3) Interactive teaching-learning strategies
- 4) Integrative teaching and learning,
- 5) project-based learning classroom environment;
- 6) Enriching views, perspectives, knowledge and experiences;

RQ3. What Factors Affect Teachers' Ability to Foster Children's Creative Thinking?

Table1. Factors affecting fostering creativity skills

S/N		SA	A	D	SD
1	Most of the schools do not have space available for creative teaching and learning	51%	32%	5%	10%
2	Our classrooms are crowded	44%	31%	20%	10%
3	Classroom management is a challenge while conducting interactive teaching	35%	30%	15%	20%
4	I have some concerns about doing some creative social studies activities.	43%	27%	16%	14%
5	Teachers need comprehensive professional development.	63%	27%	8%	2%
6	We can only support the children's' academic skills not creative skills.	59%	31%	7%	3%
7	Physical conditions and Social Studies curriculum do not overlap in terms of implementing some creative teaching-learning activities.	51%	27%	16%	6%
8	Planning and implementing creative activities take too much time in a typical school day	55%	24%	11%	10%
9	Teachers cannot support their development	100%	0%	0%	0%
10	We're not very flexible.	42%	21%	27%	10%

RQ4. What are the Teachers' Opinions on How Creativity Skills Can be fostered in the Social Studies Classroom?

Table2. Teachers' Suggestions for Nurturing Creativity in Social Studies classroom.

S/N		SA	A	D	SD
1	Schools need to be re-designed psychically	53%	27%	13%	7%
2	Teachers need supportive teaching strategies	81%	19%	0%	0%
3	Teachers need support from school management	79%	21%	0%	0%
4	Teachers need sustainable parent-school partnership	57%	23%	15%	5%
5	Teachers need knowledge and implications for practicing creativity	48%	52%	0%	0%
6	Creativity could be improved for each child in the classroom regardless of academic competencies.	53%	47%	0%	0%
7	Teachers need to be flexible and change their points of view.	32%	26%	24%	18%

5. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings were discussed based on the four research questions that guided the study, these findings emerged from the teacher interviews, teacher observations in the classroom, and questionnaire on creativity in teaching and learning in Social Studies.

The study investigated creativity in Social Studies classroom with teacher's opinions, interpretations and implementation. All the teachers believe that creativity is essential in Social Studies education and they are excited to promote it in their classrooms. They understand creativity as the ability to have divergent thinking and the ability to provide unique solutions to problems of the society. A good number of the teachers had positive attitude towards fostering creative skills, they understand creativity perfectly well, as creative potential, the ability to have independent thinking and to give new solutions to different tasks and problems. This is in agreement with these authors on creativity; (Gralewski, 2016, Gralewski & Karwowski, 2016)

The teachers also saw creativity as encouraging students to express themselves freely, encouraging the students with their proposed solutions and ideas. These findings are in agreement with Kutanoğlu's (2014) research, so it can be deduced that creative teacher behaviors may be defined in the idea of these findings.

Teachers are of the opinion that the factors which have a great impact on creativity in Social Studies can be elaborated either positively or negatively. They believe that if the factors are integrated with positive perspectives and methods, creative skills will be observed in the students, but if the reverse is the case, they could be barriers.

Teachers encountered some obstacle when implementing creativity skills on their students such as unavailability of space, crowded classrooms, teachers need for comprehensive professional development, difficulties in communication and the management of creative educational activities. There is ample overlap between the findings of this study and that of Ucus (2018) study that found low-quality curriculum and instruction, teachers' negative perception of promoting creativity and lack of teachers' flexibility, freedom, and well-qualified teacher professional development as some educational obstacles in cultivating a culture of creativity in Social Studies education.

The teachers are of the opinion that even though there are obstacles creativity skills could still be fostered in the classrooms, if the schools are re-designed physically, if the teachers are exposed to more teaching strategies, if there is enough support from the school management, if there exist a sustainable parent-school partnership and if teachers are exposed to knowledge and implications for practicing creativity among other things. According to Loveless (2015) the positive attitudes and support of parents have a high impact on children's academic achievement. He advised that, families and the school should collaborate in Social Studies based parental involvement activities.

6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The teacher has a crucial role to play in fostering creative skills in the Social Studies classes. Craft & Jeffrey (2004) laid out the relationship between teaching creatively and teaching for creativity and found that teaching creatively and teaching for creativity is usually determined by the situation. The crux of the matter is if creativity is practiced effectively, it will definitely enhance students' motivation to learn. Promoting creativity is a critical feature in the relationship between teachers and students, thus a key significance of the findings of this study is about developing the creative potential of teachers. It is important and a major component of successful teaching and sustainable professional development. The creative potential of teachers also promotes their motivation to update their knowledge both psychologically and pedagogically, in-depth study and master of their teaching subject and good teacher interaction with students.

Therefore, since teacher professional development programs improve teachers' understanding and advancement of creativity, and since creativity is a very important component of Social Studies, teachers should be encouraged in every way possible that will help them foster creativity skills in their students.

It is worth mentioning that this study was limited to only one local government area of Rivers State Nigeria with limited number of schools and the data for the study was collected at one time in a qualitative strand so one should exercise caution when applying the results to teachers in general.

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