

DRAMATIC ARTS IN INCLUSIVE EDUCATION: A CASE STUDY OF ONE HIGH SCHOOL

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Abstract

Incorporating dramatic arts into the curriculum offers essential emotional and social development opportunities in an inclusive educational environment. The qualitative case study examined the role of dramatic arts in inclusive education at a high school in the O.R. Tambo Inland District, using a purposive sample of 20 grade 10 learners. The study was grounded in Vygotsky's social constructivist theory, and the framework incorporated the principles of Universal Design for Learning to advocate flexible teaching methods. The research examined how dramatic arts facilitate social interaction and emotional expression among diverse learners. Data was collected using structured interview questions. The collected data was coded and patterns drawn. Thematic analysis was employed to identify key themes from structured interviews. Significant findings emerged from the study. Graphs and tables were drawn and interpreted. Findings reveal that dramatic arts significantly enhanced students' communication skills, allowing them to express themselves more freely and confidently. Another finding was that participation in drama activities fostered stronger peer relationships, promoting a sense of belonging and inclusion among students with varying abilities. The findings highlighted the importance of creative expression in enhancing educational experiences for all learners if included in most schools. To further support the integration of dramatic arts in schools, it is recommended that schools invest in professional development for teachers focused on drama education and allocate resources specifically for dramatic arts programs. Also, fostering partnerships with local arts organizations could enrich the curriculum and provide students with diverse artistic experiences.

Keywords: *Creativity, curriculum, dramatic arts, education, inclusivity.*

1. Introduction

Dramatic arts foster inclusive education by enhancing social interaction, emotional intelligence, and academic engagement among diverse high school students (Landsman & Lewis, 2023). A case study revealed that drama-based activities promote collaboration, communication, empathy, and teamwork while building students' confidence and sense of belonging (Pepler et al., 2022). This approach equips students with essential life skills and creates inclusive educational environments that value all voices. The research emphasised the importance of inclusive practices in education, advocating for incorporating artistic methodologies to support all learners effectively.

These research questions guided the study:

1. How do dramatic arts activities facilitate social interaction and emotional development among students with diverse learning needs in a high school?
2. What are the perceived impacts of integrating dramatic arts into the curriculum on academic engagement and performance for students in an inclusive education environment?

2. Literature review

2.1. The role of dramatic arts in inclusive education

Dramatic arts advance inclusive education by fostering collaboration, creativity, and social interaction (Pepler et al., 2022). Research shows drama activities enhance emotional and social skills, benefiting students with diverse needs. For instance, interventions improve social acceptance and reduce rejection among students with ADHD (Gerber et al., 2024). By encouraging self-expression through performance, drama creates safe spaces for exploration and belonging, promoting inclusion, and understanding in educational settings (Pepler et al., 2022).

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2.2. Benefits of drama for students with disabilities

Integrating dramatic arts into education benefits students with disabilities (Landsman & Lewis, 2023). Arts participation boosts motivation, engagement, and learning outcomes (Wong, 2021). Drama fosters peer interaction and vital life skills through shared experiences (Gerber et al., 2024). Adaptable activities ensure inclusive participation, creating meaningful learning environments for diverse abilities (Peppler et al., 2022).

2.3. Drama as a tool for social inclusion

Dramatic arts enhance learning and foster social inclusion in diverse classrooms (Landsman & Lewis, 2023). Ensemble activities teach role negotiation and creative collaboration, promoting democratic values and mutual respect (Peppler et al., 2022). This collaborative environment builds empathy, understanding, and stronger peer relationships, creating a sense of community and breaking barriers between students of differing abilities (Wong, 2021).

2.4. Challenges and considerations in implementation

Implementing dramatic arts in inclusive education faces challenges (Landsman & Lewis, 2023). Teachers need training and resources to deliver curricula suited to diverse needs (Peppler et al., 2022). Ensuring all students feel comfortable, especially those with confidence issues, is difficult (Landsman & Lewis, 2023). Institutions must support educators through professional development to foster inclusive environments for thriving through the arts (Gerber et al., 2024).

2.5. Empirical literature

2.5.1. The impact of drama on social skills development. Empirical studies show dramatic arts enhance social skills, especially for students with disabilities (Landsman & Lewis, 2023). A drama intervention for middle schoolers, including those with ADHD, increased peer acceptance and reduced rejection rates (Gerber et al., 2024; Peppler et al., 2022). It fostered friendships and belonging in classrooms (Wong, 2021). These findings underscore drama's transformative role in promoting inclusion and interpersonal relationships in diverse educational settings (Landsman & Lewis, 2023).

2.5.2. Enhancing emotional intelligence through drama. Dramatic arts foster emotional intelligence through role-playing and improvisation, helping students recognise and express emotions while building empathy (Gerber et al., 2024; Landsman & Lewis, 2023). Drama improves emotional regulation and resilience, especially for students facing social challenges (Peppler et al., 2022). Programs integrating drama report growth in navigating complex emotions, creating supportive school environments, and enhancing overall student well-being (Wong, 2021; Peppler et al., 2022).

2.5.3. Drama as a pedagogical strategy for inclusion. Integrating dramatic arts into education promotes inclusion (Landsman & Lewis, 2023). Drama-based learning supports differentiated instruction, accommodating diverse learning styles and abilities (Gerber et al., 2024). Collaborative projects foster teamwork, creativity, and inclusive spaces where all voices are valued (Peppler et al., 2022). This approach enhances academic achievement and builds community, enabling educators to adapt lessons for diverse learners (Wong, 2021; Landsman & Lewis, 2023).

2.5.4. Challenges in implementing drama in inclusive settings. Despite its benefits, implementing dramatic arts in inclusive education faces challenges (Landsman & Lewis, 2023). Teachers often lack training, resources, and time to integrate drama effectively (Gerber et al., 2024). Some students may feel anxious or uncomfortable participating, limiting engagement (Peppler et al., 2022). Addressing these issues requires professional development and supportive environments that encourage creativity and risk-taking, maximizing drama's potential for inclusion (Wong, 2021; Peppler et al., 2022).

3. Theoretical framework

The study's framework emphasised creativity, collaboration, and social interaction (Glaveanu et al., 2020). Vygotsky's social constructivism highlighted learning through peer engagement (Shah, 2022). Drama encouraged self-expression, empathy, and role negotiation, while Universal Design for Learning ensured inclusive participation (Glaveanu et al., 2020). This approach fostered meaningful involvement, valuing every student's voice within an inclusive educational environment (Glaveanu et al., 2020).

4. Methodology

4.1. Research design

The study employed a qualitative research design to explore the role of dramatic arts in promoting inclusive education within a high school setting (Rudduck, 2020). By focusing on the lived experiences of students and educators, the research aimed to understand how dramatic arts activities influenced social skills, emotional development, and overall academic engagement among diverse students (Glaveanu et al., 2020).

4.1.1. Population. The selected population for the study included 20 Grade 10 learners from a single high school (Creswell, 2021). The specific group was chosen to explore how dramatic arts could enhance social skills, creativity, and collaboration among students, particularly in an inclusive educational environment (Levitt, 2021). The students represented a diverse mix of backgrounds, abilities, and learning needs, which was essential for understanding the impact of dramatic arts on inclusivity (Gill, 2020).

4.1.2. Sampling Method. A non-probability sampling technique of 20 grade 10 students was employed for the case study, specifically purposive sampling (Stratton, 2021). The method allowed for selecting participants likely to provide rich and relevant information about the subject under investigation (Levitt, 2021). By focusing on students who have engaged with dramatic arts in an inclusive setting, the research aims to gather data that reflects their experiences and perceptions (Gill, 2020).

4.3. Data collection

4.3.1. Structured interviews. Data collection for the study of dramatic arts in inclusive education was primarily conducted through structured interviews (Stratton, 2021). The method was chosen to gather specific, comparable information from participants while allowing for a focused exploration of their experiences and perspectives (Gill, 2020). Structured interviews involved a predetermined set of questions designed to elicit detailed responses regarding the impact of dramatic arts on social skills, emotional development, and academic engagement (Levitt, 2021).

4.3.2. Interview process. Individual interviews were conducted with 20 grade 10 students in a dramatic arts program, lasting 30–45 minutes in a secluded setting to encourage openness (Stratton, 2021). Participants were informed of their rights, including confidentiality and withdrawal options (Levitt, 2021). Carefully crafted questions elicited descriptive responses, providing insights into students' experiences with dramatic arts (Gill, 2020).

4.3.3. Recording and transcription. All interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent to ensure accurate data capture (Levitt, 2021). Following the interviews, recordings were transcribed verbatim for analysis (Gill, 2020). The process allowed for thoroughly examining participants' responses, ensuring their voices were accurately represented in the findings (Stratton, 2021).

4.3.4. Rationale for using structured interviews. Structured interviews facilitated consistency across data collection, enabling comparisons between participants' responses (Stratton, 2021). The method also allowed for efficient data collection while focusing on specific research questions (Gill, 2020). By employing structured interviews, the study aimed to gather comprehensive insights into how dramatic arts contribute to inclusive education within the high school context, enriching the understanding of the educational practice (Levitt, 2021).

4.3.5. Data treatment and analysis. Thematic analysis was utilised to Analyse the qualitative data collected from structured interviews (Stratton, 2021). Transcripts were coded to identify key themes and patterns related to the benefits and challenges of integrating dramatic arts into inclusive education (Gill, 2020). The iterative process involved reviewing the data multiple times to ensure that emerging themes accurately represented participants' experiences (Levitt, 2021). The findings were then organized into coherent categories that highlighted the transformative potential of dramatic arts in fostering an inclusive learning environment (Gill, 2020).

4.3.6. Ethical considerations. Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant institutional review board before conducting the study (Stratton, 2021). Informed consent was secured from all participants, ensuring they understood the purpose of the research and their right to withdraw at any time (Gill, 2020). Confidentiality was maintained throughout the study by anonymizing participant data and securely storing

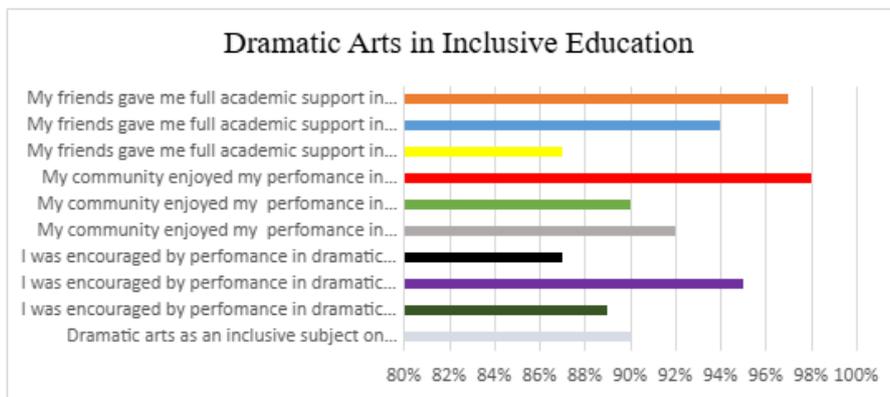
all research materials. These ethical considerations ensured that the research adhered to best practices while respecting participants' rights and well-being (Levitt, 2021).

5. Findings

Figure 1. Dramatic arts and themes.

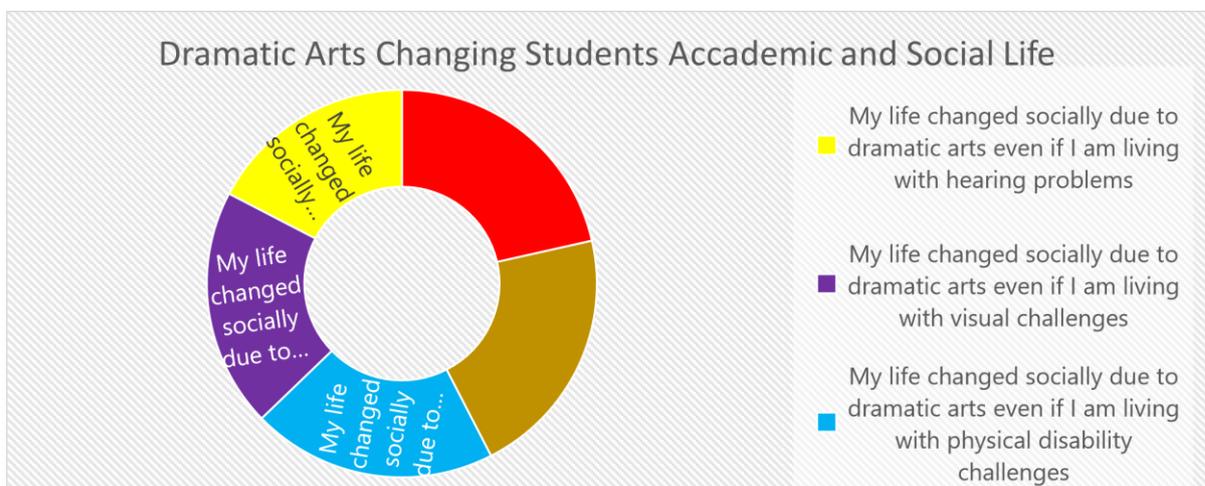
	Research Question	Theme
1	How do dramatic arts activities facilitate social interaction and emotional development among students with diverse learning needs in high school?	Dramatic arts and social interaction in diverse learning needs.
2	What are the perceived impacts of integrating dramatic arts into the curriculum on academic engagement and performance for students in an inclusive education environment?	Integrating dramatic arts into an inclusive curriculum.

Figure 2. Positive Aspects of Dramatic Arts in Inclusive Education.



From Figure 2, participants reported that: My friends gave me full academic support in dramatic arts even if I am living with hearing challenges 97%, My friends gave me full academic support in dramatic arts even if I am living with visual challenges 94%, My friends gave me full academic support in dramatic arts even if I am living with physical disability 89%, My community enjoyed my performance in dramatic arts performance even if I am living with hearing challenges 90%, My community enjoyed my performance in dramatic arts performance even if I am living with visual challenges 92%, I was encouraged by performance in dramatic arts even if I am living with hearing challenges 89%, I was encouraged by performance in dramatic arts even if I am living with visual challenges 95%, I was encouraged by performance in dramatic arts even if I am living with physical disability 89%, Dramatic arts as an inclusive subject for hearing, visual changing and physical disability 90%.

Figure 3. Positive Academic and Social Change Due to Inclusivity of Dramatic Arts



My life changed socially due to dramatic arts even if I am living with hearing problems 80%; My life changed socially due to dramatic arts even if I am living with visual challenges 92%; my life changed socially due to dramatic arts even if I am living with physical disability challenges 94%, I gained confidence in my studies due to dramatic arts even if I am living with hearing problems 97%, I gained confidence in my studies due to dramatic arts even if I am living with visual issues 99%.

6. Discussion of the findings

The study highlights the dramatic arts' role in fostering inclusivity and improving outcomes for students with disabilities. Peer support was noted by 97% of students with hearing challenges and 94% with visual challenges. Engagement boosted confidence, with 99% of visually impaired participants reporting increased self-assurance. These findings align with Creswell's (2021) mixed-methods research and Glaveanu et al.'s (2020) socio-cultural perspective, emphasising creativity's role in personal growth and community belonging (Gerber et al., 2024). Performances also enhanced social integration.

7. Conclusion

The study highlights the transformative impact of dramatic arts in inclusive education for students with disabilities. The findings reveal that participation in dramatic arts fosters academic support, enhances self-confidence, and promotes social integration among peers and the community. The positive experiences reported by participants highlight the necessity of incorporating artistic discipline into educational frameworks to create equitable learning environments. By embracing the diverse abilities of all students, academic institutions can cultivate a more inclusive atmosphere that values creativity and empowers individuals to thrive academically and socially.

8. Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, several practical recommendations were made. Educational institutions may need to integrate dramatic arts into the curriculum from grade 10 to grade 12 as a core subject to promote inclusivity and support diverse students. Training for dramatic arts teachers on inclusive teaching strategies in the arts may be essential to ensure all students receive equitable support. Also, fostering partnerships with local arts organisations may provide resources and opportunities for students with disabilities to engage in dramatic arts practical performances. Schools may need to create awareness campaigns to highlight the benefits of dramatic arts, encouraging community involvement and support for inclusive artistic initiatives in dramatic arts.

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