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Improving the Communication Skills of Autistic Children through Artistic Interaction: Case Study of Therapeutic Daycare Centre, Abakpa Nike, Enugu

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Abstract

The major purpose of this study was to explore the possibilities of using the kinesthetic imports of art to improve interaction among autistic children. Specifically, the study exposed autistic children to the following; Drawing and Colouring for psychotherapy, Assemblage Art for cognition, Kinesthetic Art for interaction, and Re-test with the three art forms combined. It was an experimental study. Population comprised 30 autistic children, treatment group; (n=15) and control group; (n=15). The instruments developed and used for treatment and data collection were; the Syllabus for Experimental Art Classes (SEAC), which was the curriculum for interventions, and the Percentage Scoring and Rating Chart (PSRC), which was used to rate responses to the two interventions; School Treatment Art Classes (STAC) and the Home Re-test Combined Art Classes (HRCAC). Direct observation was basis for progress percentage rating. The results showed; (i) significant decline in screaming fits, (ii) improvement on photo-sense, (iii) elongation of attention span, (iv) development of assemblage skills, and (v) enormous drop in mood swing. It is recommended that art and interactive learning be improved upon in special schools, not just as a subject but a creative way of teaching other subjects. This is mainly because art is a reliable kinesthetic strategy for managing autistic children both at home and school.

Key words: Kinesthetic, therapeutic, assemblage art, autistic, photo-sense, attention span.

Introduction

Autism is a neuro-developmental disorder that hampers the interaction skills of children. The symptoms include repetitive behaviours, self-injuries, screaming fits and restricted interests. In defining autism, researchers get tempted to do so from the points of view of its characteristics, causes and effects.

UnderstandingSpecialEducation.Com (2018) avers that the definition of autism

is a complex process. Most experts agree that autism is a brain development disorder characterized by impaired social interactions, limited communication and repetitive behaviours. Signs usually appear before age 3. The cause isn't clear, but recent scientific studies believe there is a strong genetic base. New research comes out almost every day on possible causes. Some groups advocate for environmental causes such as induced labor, heavy metals, pesticides and childhood vaccinations. **A**utism occurs four times more in boys than in girls**.** The diagnosis of autism spectrum disorders has drastically risen since the 1980's. Some studies now claim 1-150 children are diagnosed as autistic with occurrence in as many as 1-94 boys. The above submission by UnderstandingSpecialEducation.Com (2018), in its seeming all-encompassment, still wouldn't suffice, to relay all primary facts about autism. Happe (2008) states that it has long been presumed that there is a common cause at the genetic, cognitive and neural levels for autism's characteristic triad of symptoms. Happe, Ronald and Plomin (2006) further clarify that there is increasing suspicion that autism is instead a complex disorder whose aspects have distinct causes that often co-occur. While Ajumobi (2007) asserts; autism comes with some kind of characters like, a child can tip-toe, might not have good communication of language, speech might be blunt, and they find pleasure in repeating same things over and over. Snyder and Thomas (2011) aver that errors in cognition among the autistic are ubiquitous… even assumptions about the more intrinsic attributes in common with all objects can cause illusions. Activities for autistic children should be fun and engaging. But if they become a source of frustration, the benefits of the action may be lost. Autistic children may not know exactly what their interests and favourite activities might be. So, it is up to the parent to introduce them to several areas of interest (Cheryl, 2011).

According to Shankar Rao (2015), of all the groups that affect the lives of individuals in society none touches them so intimately or so, continuously as does the family. In view of the above, the family being the first and most immediate social environment a child is exposed to, should explore all creative variables for full child development especially where there are developmental challenges as in the case of autism. Haralambos and Holborn (2013) expatiate that family performs four basic functions of sexual, reproductive, economic and educational in all societies. He buttresses that all these are interconnected since without the sexual and reproductive functions there would be no members of society, without economic function life would cease and without education there would be no culture. According to Brasford, Brown and Cocking (2000, 217), all new learning involves transfer based on previous learning. Family, thus, plays a crucial role in the education of its members both handicapped and normal.

Art is an expressive mode of communication and artistic expressions play vital roles in human development and the understanding of his environment. Ndubuisi (2015) posits that each region in Nigeria has their own arts which are drawn from their rich cultural heritage and tradition. She buttresses that the arts make people complete, thus education and engagement in the fine arts are essential part of school curriculum. In the words of Ndubuisi (2016), every child is born with creative ability. This is why the first language of a child is scribbling; however, the environment will either develop or destroy it. The opinion of Ndubuisi above is succinct; a lot of creative potentials have not been tapped into, thereby wasting the chances of the bearers becoming better persons in society. According to Draycot (2018), art lessons have benefits both practical and emotional. Some young autistic children may struggle with their fine motor skills, for which the simple act of guiding crayons over paper can render a huge improvement. However, as well as honing their motor skills, making drawings allows autistic children to communicate thoughts and feelings they may otherwise struggle to express. The Department of Education and Early Childhood (2018) submits; education in art is essential. Human experience is ordered in various ways, including kinesthetically, musically, numerically, verbally, and visually. Students need to experience and practice recognizing and understanding the relations between these areas of human experience if they are to gain the optimal benefit from education. Education in art helps students become elective and discriminating in their judgments and improve their understanding of their environment.

In Nigeria, special education and care-giving have become more expensive both in schools and at homes. Parents and teachers of autistic children have inevitably become managers of "special" scarce resources while the same results are still being expected from them as in the days of economic boom. But art can be utilized, bearing a myriad of specialized teaching methods, to enhance learning for the autistic children. Draycot (2018) affirms that many autistic children struggle in conventional classrooms because the methods utilized do not suit their own particular way of doing things. The idea of adapting their personal methods can be upsetting. Art gives them a degree of control over their learning experience which many greatly appreciate.

The Art Council of England has long embraced the importance of art in general development. To this effect, Hickman (2010) submits that the art council of England has supported visual artists working in a range of places and situations since 1966 through its 'Art in Site for Learning Scheme' (AiSfLS). The role that artists play in the scheme is complex and multi-faceted. In providing opportunities for individuals, challenged or not, to express themselves, therapeutic and reassuring results could occur. Contemporary art can be driven by both theory and ideas, and is also characterized by a blurring of the distinction between art and other

categories of cultural experience, such as television, cinema, mass media, entertainment and digital technology (Ndon; 2016). And in the array of idealist and theoretic provenances of art, there is therapy, both in the long run and otherwise.

According to Packard (1987), therapy has been defined as a healing treatment; art therapy is the use of art in a therapeutic setting for the psychological improvement of human conditions. According to Wolf (1971), though the power of art to transform human emotions was recognized early by Plato, it was not until during the 19th century that the by-products of art activities and art objects were seen as having healing potentials. Okoli (2007) buttresses that therapy is working with a child physically, mentally, emotionally and academically. Care for them must be put at par with their mates. We discover that most autistic children are very brilliant and so we try to bring them out of their shell to exhibit their artistic talents which to them is also of healing potentials. Art therapy is ideally suited for addressing sensory processing disorder (SPD), a pervasive problem in autism which contributes to a great deal of difficult emotions and behaviors, yet is too often overlooked (Lacour, 2018).

In the words of Ovraiti (2005), art is a language that is embraced when you begin to understand the worth. Art Therapy is a mental health profession that uses the creative process of art making to improve and enhance the physical, mental and emotional well-being of individuals of all ages. And Kettley (2010) asserts that imagination is more important than knowledge; for knowledge is limited while imagination embraces the whole world. So it is right to point out the fact that education liberates the mind, especially if it's a combination of cognitive and kinesthetic measures. Approaches to art therapy differ. Broder (2008) observes that no particular effective treatment of autism which is life long has been pinned down. Special schooling, support and counseling of families and sometimes behaviour therapy can be helpful. Collier (1999) states that drawing should be used by beginning students to record their personal and instructive reactions to all kinds of stimuli whether initiated by the senses, by intuition, by emotion or by intellect. In the face of special schooling crises, managers of neural handicap sometimes adopt economic measures that do not augur well with the daily needs of special children. To the teacher or instructor of children in a special school, what matters is a way out of the cluster of possible pedagogical resorts. To the parent of an autistic child, care adjustments have to be considered because the autistic child has normal siblings who also need attention and care. But to the autistic child himself, his unpredictable needs and attention, in their diversities must be attended to, economic austerity notwithstanding. Special care givers, therefore, consistently adopt and shuffle inexpensive measures in order to arrive at the best therapeutic results. In the above instance, art is here fostered. Experienced specialist art therapist,

Claire Tottle submits; for many autistic pupils eye contact is difficult, reading the emotions and feelings of others a challenge. Portrait work can help this. Begin by looking at a selection of portraits, discuss how the people could be feeling, (the teacher might have to feed a lot into this discussion). Look at portraits where the emotion is obvious: for example a smile, asking: What makes you feel like this? Talk about anger and sadness too, if appropriate, emotions like shyness or excitement may be too complex for some pupils to read (Tottle, 2016).

And in furtherance, Lacour (2018) offers; broadly speaking, art therapy promotes mental and emotional growth through art making. Unlike art instruction, art therapy is conducted with the aim of building life skills, addressing deficits and problem behaviors, and promoting healthy self-expression. In the words of Lesser (2018), developing a familiarity with different art materials can help a child's fine and gross motor skills, while letting them become more flexible in unfamiliar scenarios. Perhaps most importantly, art therapy can allow a child with ASD to express their feelings and impressions of the world.

Purpose of the Study

The major purpose of this study was to investigate the potentials of ameliorating the communication skills of autistic children with artistic treatment. Specifically, the study;

1. used drawing and colouring exercises to achieve psychotherapy,
2. involved the autistic children in assemblage art with collage and paper puppet making to improve cognitive learning,
3. engaged the autistic children in kinesthetic learning with clay and plasticine moulding for interaction, and
4. engaged the artistic inclinations of autistic pupils in a different location by combining all three art forms in a home re-test exercise.

Methodology

Area of the Study: The area of study was Enugu, the Capital of Enugu State, South-East, Nigeria. Apart from the School for the Deaf and Dumb, Ogbete, in Enugu metropolis and the Special Education Centre, Oji River, and some mixed schools, it is in doubt if there is any other government-owned special school in Enugu and its surroundings where atypical students are taken care of, with specialized teaching. Even at that, only privately owned and mission special schools have proven to be partially embracing artistic and creative pedagogies for special care giving. One of such private special schools is The Therapeutic Day Care Centre Abakpa Nike, Enugu where the current research was carried out. The school was chosen because it embraces veritable creative opportunities and facilities that encourage kinesthetic and illustrative special education. Art and vocational education are fostered in the school with the provision of workshops, studios, and an array of materials suitable for different categories of special students. The elementary classes

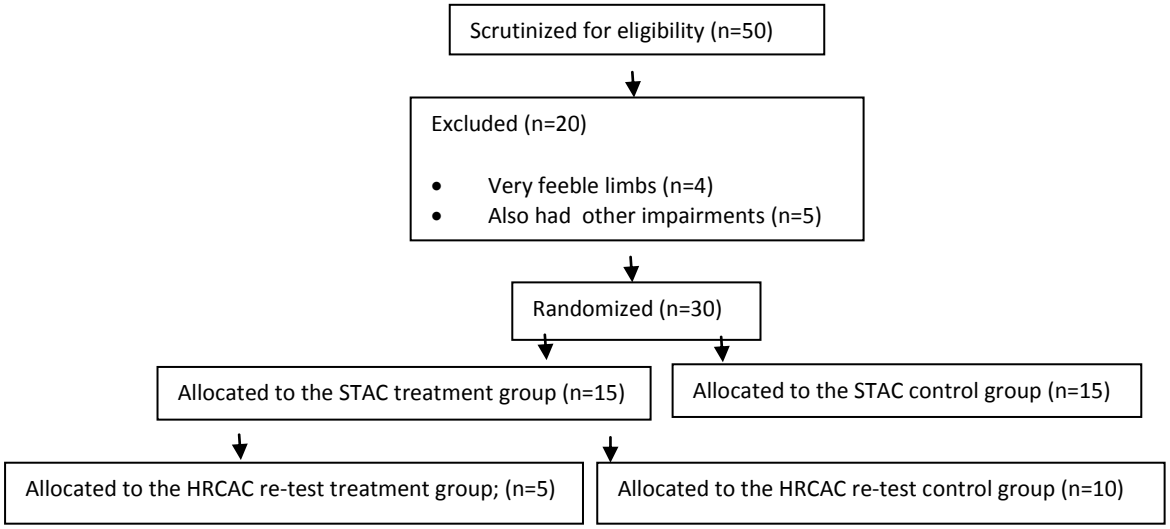
run special schooling for persons with cognitive difficulties, as well as inclusive education for various kinds of mentally and physically challenged persons. The sheltered workshop, an arm of the school, is specifically for older handicapped students, where crafts and vocational skills are taught. Both sections of the school are located in serene areas of Abakpa Nike, Enugu.

Design of the Study: The study was experimental. An experimental research design is the type in which comparison is made between causes and effects. It involves taking action to influence a phenomenon under study and then observing the consequences of the influence. The study was planned in such a way that the experimental group was exposed to selected art forms for three weeks; one art form (Tuesdays and Thursdays) of each week in the Therapeutic Daycare Centre, Abakpa Nike, Enugu. Then, on the fourth week, all the selected art forms were returned in a combined form for a home-re-test. The experimental group was treated to the exercise while the control group was not. Precaution was taken not to include children with mental and physical retardations other than autism. This is to ensure equality of treatment and chance of equal response to the stipulated artistic exercises they were being treated to.

Population for the Study: From an initial population of 50 autistic children between primary 1-4, 15; 10 boys and 5 girls were randomly selected for the treatment or experiment tagged: School Treatment Art Classes (STAC). The same population (n=15) also constituted the control group. After the 3 weeks exercise, 5 autistic children from the STAC experimental group (n=5: 3 boys and 2 girls) were re-tested with all 3 art forms in a sample home experiment tagged: Home Re-test Combined Art Classes (HRCAC) while the balance of 10 constituted the home re-test control group. Whole population (N=30); treatment group (n=15), control group (n=15), re-test treatment group (n=5); re-test control group (n=10).

Sample for the Study: From the initial population of 50 children bearing traces of autism, the randomized sampling approach was used to select 15 autistic children (n=15) for the treatment group and 15 (n=15) for the control group. 20 of them who did not meet with the required criteria for inclusion were left off. The criteria for selection are shown on the participant eligibility criteria chart below:

Fig 1: Participant eligibility criteria



Instruments for Execution and Data Collection: The primary instrument that guided treatment proceedings was the Syllabus for Experimental Art Classes (SEAC), developed by the researchers. In carrying out artistic experiment, care is usually taken to outline the foreseeable order of application of materials, media and their methods. The order of artistic events, must comply with the dictates of the elements and principles of design, especially where elementary visual art is concerned. In projecting the elements and principles of design, the two and three dimensional art forms are usually enclosed. When this is done, the treatment could boast of having administered all forms of visual art with their targeted, foreseeable or unforeseeable results. The goals of drafting such syllabuses for artistic treatment is also, usually enclosed. The current study has the structured syllabus containing the following manipulative elementary art forms; Drawing/Colouring (2-dimensional art), Collage/Paper Puppet Making (2 and 3-dimensional art combined) and Clay/Plasticine Moulding (3-dimensional art) for 3 weeks school treatment and 1 week home treatment. The contents of the syllabus were randomly selected from a programme of elementary art education developed. Based on the above-given principles, it was validated by Professor O.K. Oyeoku; Art Educationist and Ceramic Artist, also head of the Art Education section of the department of Fine and Applied Arts, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, and Dr. Mike Okwudili, Art Educationist and Curriculum designer, also Rector of OSISATECH Polytechnic, Enugu.

Fig 2: Syllabus for Experimental Art Classes (SEAC)

SCHOOL TREATMENT ART CLASSES (STAC)			
Duration: ART FORMS:	**WEEK I DRAWING & COLOURING**	**WEEK II COLLAGE/PAPER PUPPET MAKING**	**WEEK III CLAY/PLASTICINE MOULDING**
Objectives:	**2-dimensional design for increased photo-sense & Therapy**	**2-dimenaional design for improvement of Cognitive skills**	**3-dimensional design for Kinesthetic art and interactive learning**
Tuesday:	Free hand and imaginative drawing. Scrolls, spirals and adventitious lines.	Arrangement of basic shapes, placing of paper gums, beads, seeds and cut papers in heaps of colours. Drawing of objects as guided and assemblage of paper and other materials	Introduction to clay behavior by wetting, kneading and balling. Finger puppetting with clay. Introduction to rolling, coiling and placements of slabs
Thursday:	Compositional drawings of shapes and objects. Colouring with crayons, shading and hatching with pencils and pastels	Puppet making; demonstrative teaching of how to make selected paper puppets. Kites, teddies and self-made toys emerge.	Demonstrative teaching of clay wall building and image making; coiling, slab and thumbing methods. Introduction to plasticine use, colour combination in clay assemblage and miniature bust making etc
HOME RE-TEST COMBINESD ART CLASSES (HRCAC)			
WEEK IV:	**Tuesday;** Drawing & colouring	**Thursday;** Collage/paper puppet making	**Saturday;** Clay/plasticine moulding

Source: Alu, N. F. et al (Research 2018)

The secondary instrument was a technically drafted Percentage Scoring and Rating Chart (PSRC) meant for recording progressive responses and their percentage equivalents during the experiments. Specifically, the School Treatment Art Classes (STAC) and the Home Re-test Combined Art Classes

(HRCAC) were observed and their responses rated in percentages. The rating parameters (a combination of expected artistic and autistic behaviours) were the baselines for scoring, as to whether they increased or decreased, in each case. Each of them accrued to the selected art forms, a maximum of 25% score per week. The instrument was also validated by Professor O.K. Oyeoku; Art Educationist and Ceramic Artist, also head of the Art education section of the department of Fine and Applied Arts, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, and Dr. Mike Okwudili, Art Educationist and Curriculum designer, also Rector of OSISATECH Polytechnic, Enugu. During a pilot treatment class monitored by the experts mentioned above, the instrument was tested for surface and content validity, and it was approved. The scoring and rating chart has its assessment parameters as follows:

1. Identification of images and basic shapes (artistic)
2. Manipulation and exploration of art materials (artistic)
3. Self-withdrawal (autistic)
4. Cognitive and imaginative skills (artistic/autistic)
5. Assemblage and colour grading (artistic)
6. Interaction and hyperactivity (artistic/autistic)
7. Attention span (autistic/artistic)
8. Distraction and Screaming fits (autistic)
9. Mood swing (autistic)
10. Familiarizing with materials and media (artistic)

Data Collection/Treatment Procedure: Direct observation of response was the basis for percentage scoring. For 3 weeks (Tuesdays and Thursdays per week), the autistic children were treated SEAC. In the first week, DRAWING and COLOURING exercises was the subject of treatment, representing two dimensional designs. The autistic children were progressively, guided through the processes of lines making and image formation, aimed at eliciting cognitive and photo-sense communication through 'life and still life drawing' first, and later, 'image formation and colouration'. The second week had the subject COLLAGE/PAPER PUPPET MAKING being used to foster a combination of two-dimensional and three-dimensional arts. For collage art, cut pieces of paper, pebbles and beads were consciously and serially dislodged, and the children were guided to assemble them in ranges of colours, similitude or otherwise of shapes, and perspective making. The autistic children were not however made to handle sharp objects like the scissors and cutter. This was to avoid exposing them to harm, since some of them readily use anything within reach as play material. The skills of assemblage and installation art were targeted for improvement. The same assemblage process was followed to make paper and fabric puppets, targeted at elongating attention span

and redirecting moribund focus, among other benefits. In the third week, Clay/Plasticine Moulding was the subject being used to foster the procedures of elementary three-dimensional art. Though clay is readily more available and cheaper to obtain than plasticine, the latter is a medium easily manipulated and degradable by children. The free-range system and exploration tendencies in clay manipulation made this a readily accepted subject of artistic and social interaction. In the fourth week, a combination of the three treatment subjects was made in a selected home re-test exercise five of the 15 autistic children hitherto treated in school. In each week, data were being collated by direct observation while response to each treatment subject (per week) was scored at 25% maximum rating per column. The home re-test experiment (fourth week) was also maximally rated at 25%. All the four subjects should, therefore poll a maximum score of 100% cumulative rating per rating parameter row. The aim was not to score the individual response rate of the autistic pupils to each art form but to assess the progress rate or otherwise of all members of the experimental group per art form as guided by the purpose of the study.

Findings of the Study

The Percentage Rating and Scoring Chart (PRSC) below bears data collated from the school based experiments (as contained in weeks 1-3) and the home re-test exercises (week 4).

Fig 3: Percentage Rating and Scoring Chart (PRSC) bearing the STAC and HRCAC Interventions Findings

	ASSESSMENT PARAMETERS	**STAC WK 1 25%**	**STAC WK 2 25%**	**STAC WK 3 25%**	**HRCAC WK 4 25%**	**TOTAL 100%**	**REMARKS**
1	Identification of images and basic shapes	20%	17%	21%	24%	82%	Excellent improvement
2	Manipulation/ Exploration	15%	15%	22%	23%	75%	Very good discovery
3	Self-withdrawal	10%	6%	3%	4%	23%	Massive drop
4	Cognitive/ imaginative skills	15%	22%	24%	25%	86%	Excellent improvement
5	Assemblage/colour grading	9%	20%	21%	23%	73%	Very good improvement
6	Interaction/Hyperac tivity	10%	23%	25%	24%	82%	Massive increase
7	Attention span	15%	22%	24%	24%	85%	Huge elongation
8	Distraction/Screami	10%	5%	3%	4%	22%	Massive drop

	ng fits						
9	Mood swing	10%	5%	2%	4%	21%	Massive drop
10	Familiarizing with materials and media	8%	18%	20%	24%	70%	Increase in familiarization

In the first week, under ***Drawing/Colouring,*** *Identification of Images* garnered a score of 20% shift from communicative redundancy while *Manipulation* had 15%. *Self Withdrawal* got a low ebb of 10%, *Cognitive Skills*; 15%, *Assemblage*; 9%, *Interaction*; 10%, *Attention Span*: 15%, *Distraction and Screaming Fits;* 10%, *Mood swing*; 10% and *Familiarization with art media*; 8%. The second week exercise; ***Collage and Paper Puppet Art*** polled 17% score under *Identification of Images, Manipulation;* 15%. *Self Withdrawal; 6%*, *Cognitive Skills*; 22%, *Assemblage*; 20%, *Interaction*; 23%, *Attention Span*: 22%, *Distraction and Screaming Fits*; 23%, *Mood swing*; 5% and *Familiarization with art media*; 18%. In the third week under the exercise ***Clay and Plasticine Moulding,*** 21% accrued to *Identification of Images*, *Manipulation of clay;* 22%. *Self Withdrawal; 3%*, *Cognitive Skills*; 24%, *Assemblage*; 21%, *Interaction*; 25%, *Attention Span*: 24%, *Distraction and Screaming Fits*; 3%, *Mood swing*; 2% and *Familiarization with art media*; 20%. The HRCAC had 5 of the sampled 15 STAC autistic pupils re-tested with all 3 art forms and *Identification of Images ganered* 24%, *Manipulation of all the art media;* 23%, *Self Withdrawal and* 4% drop. But *Cognitive Skills* polled a 100% score of 25%. *Assemblage*; 23%, *Interaction*; 24%, *Attention Span*: 24%, *Distraction and Screaming Fits*; 4%, *Mood swing*; 4% and *Familiarization with art media*: 24%. The HRCAC results showed significant improvement from the earlier records of the STAC intervention, meaning that if interventions continued, improvement would have increased along.

Discussion of Findings

A summative relay of the interventions findings is shown below:

Fig 4: Summary of the STAC and HRCAC Intervention Findings

	ASSESSMENT PARAMETERS	**STAC and HRCAC cumulative percentage ratings**	**DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**
1	Identification of images and basic shapes	82%	The autistic children broadened their knowledge of basic shapes with guided drawings and lines making. This however, progressed weekly.
2	Manipulation/Exploration	75%	They discovered wider ranges of manipulative

			skills with three dimensional and assemblage art
3	Self-withdrawal	23%	There were individual massive drops on self-withdrawal and extreme introversion, due to the kinesthetic involvements offered by creative arts
4	Cognitive/ imaginative skills	86%	A very high level of thinking in form of images and colours was achieved. The autistic children thus became better cognitive learners.
5	Assemblage/colour grading	73%	There was a very rapid improvement on the skills of arranging objects, compositional drawing, colour sorting, and gradation.
6	Interaction/Hyperactivity	82%	Interaction generally improved and rapidly too, especially among the introverted autistic children.
7	Attention span	85%	Attention span was significantly elongated, this was noticeable when those in the control groups were sampled in normal classes with those treated to the intervention art classes.
8	Distraction/Screaming fits	22%	There were massive drops in screaming fits.
9	Mood swing	21%	Mood swing was put under check and Subsequently diverted to creative thinking and artistic manipulations.
10	Familiarizing with materials and media	70%	In view of all the above, the autistic children familiarized a great deal with art materials and media compared to those in the control groups.

Source: Alu, N. F. et al (Research 2018)

In consonance with the research purpose which was aimed at using; Drawing and Colouring exercises to achieve therapy, Assemblage Art for improving cognition, Kinesthetic Art for interaction and re-testing with Combined Art Forms and from the discussion of findings on fig. 4, we deduce that the therapeutic options of creative arts for autistic children are of very high amplitude. Findings are buttressed by Marcos (2016) affirming

that art projects are recognized as effective forms of therapy to help kids who have a diagnosis of autism or other learning disabilities. Marcos buttresses; the American Art Therapy Association and the British Association for Art Therapists recognize that art therapy fosters 'healing and enhances life.' Art is often the strength of autistic children. Encouraging strengths is important in developing self-esteem. From data on fig 3 and 4, it is clear that Drawing and Colouring helped the autistic children to achieve therapy whereas Assemblage and Puppet art making elicited worthwhile cognitive learning. Also Kinesthetic Art exercise improved inter and intra personal interactions among the sampled autistic children. This was even more evident among the STAC treatment and waitlist group members when they were compared. And also during the HRCAC post-test.

Ordinarily, children with autism Spectrum Disorder don't have the same motor fantasies as normal children, their play skills and emotions differ and they have problems keeping friendships due to their communication weaknesses (Raisingchildren.net.au, 2017; 160,459). But art can be an effective way to communicate. Art can also fulfill the sensory needs of children on the autism spectrum (Marcos; 2016, 1). Lacour (2018) posits that in recent years, caregivers seeking alternative or complimentary treatments have a broader range of options available. One such treatment is art therapy. In addition, we also infer that it is more therapeutically rewarding to engage autistic children in artistic exercises than using finished artistic images to teach them. This inference is supported by Draycot, (2018) in his assertion that a child shown a map and told the names of the countries on it may become bored or frustrated, let their attention wander, or simply refuse to participate in the lesson. (But) a child asked to draw their own map, and make it as accurate as possible, immediately has much more control over their learning experience. They are more likely to become engaged in the task, actively seeking out the information they need on their own terms. Still on exploration and freedom of the mind, Sholt & Gavron (2004) posit that the softness of an art medium like clay, for example, helps children in art therapy to express their inner fantasies and emotions, while its three-dimensional quality encourages them to engage in the creative process. Specialist SEN art teacher, Claire Tottle would not hesitate to submit the benefits of art for autistic children. According to Tottle (2016), with the right approach, in my opinion all children on the autistic spectrum can benefit from art activities. My experience of teaching art to autistic pupils has shown me this. In the art room many will find a sense of calm, inspiration and sensory fulfillment. And, Themomkind.com (2017) adds that though it may seem cliché art and autism are a great combination. For those of us who cannot always get words to come out of our mouths, art offers a way of self-expression. For children, it allows their imagination to

run wild and come to life before their eyes.

In the tropics, having an autistic child at home is a source of great worry. Regretting the untoward experiences autistic and other Special Needs children go through in Nigeria, Obinna (2017) cries; imagine having to take care of a child with disability without knowing what to do or where to go? If you can imagine these, then you will appreciate what a number of Nigerian parents who have children with Autism Spectrum Disorder, ASD, are going through. In addition to Obinna's submission, the comparative care giving approaches between the normal children and the autistic one (as the parents are wont to suffer), and the feeling of abnormality by the autistic child himself, are tending angles to the autism trauma. So, on the side of the parents or care givers, it is very tasking to cope with the cost of managing autism. But artistic options are reachable and relatively cheap. To avoid the bias of inferiority complex on the side of the autistic child, which he may not be able to express vocally, it is good to adopt measures that would increase interaction between the autistic child and the normal ones. On the engendering of interaction during art exercises, Tottle (2016) posits that art is a way of building social skills. Pupils can be encouraged to work together on a joint piece of art, scaffolded by an adult.

Conclusion

Legally, every Nigerian child has the right to education and good health, rights to develop, and to participate actively in the promotion of his/ her rights, according to the 1990 Convention on the Rights of the Child. These also include the right of children with disability. But the one dollar question now is: Are these children really getting attention as written in the said convention which Nigeria has ratified and signed into law? (Obinna, 2017).

From the foregoing, irrespective of whether a child is autistic or normal, he deserves all the care and education that the parents can muster. Care givers must detach from superstitious beliefs accruing to Special Needs Children in order to be able to accept available psychotherapeutic options like the arts. Obinna (2017) regrets that today, little or no attention is paid to various disabilities in Nigeria. Many of these children are erroneously believed to be products of witchcraft while some are locked up in a room by their parents and left to die. Most children living with ASD are denied basic human rights, resulting in poor quality of life and trauma for their parents, relations and care givers.

The current experimental study was result-yielding but not without the attendant challenges of indulging special children with autism, some of whom are morbidly fascinated, in the repetitious, play-like and kinesthetically involving programme of visual arts. Though the experiment was carried out at the elementary levels of 2-dimensional and 3-dimensional arts, care was taken not to expose the autistic children to toxic and sharp art

objects, to avoid injury. This is because for the extroverted ones among them, anything within reach soon goes to the mouth and even becomes a material for playing.

Recommendations

- It is recommended that art be explored in special schooling, not just as a subject but a creative way of teaching other aspects of learning or subjects.
- There is need for parents, teachers and guardians of autistic children to adapt artistic measures for reliable therapeutic and neuro-developmental results.
- For autistic children, mood swing is a common feature but art could be used to re-direct them towards skills-engaging and communicable activities.
- Interactive art activities are capable of elongating the attention span of autistic children.
- The psychotherapeutic impact of art on autistic children is so positive that art is recommended to be part of their daily educational routines
- With artistic engagements, even the hyperactive autistic child can be localized to a concentration point that will focus his brain to the precepts of kinesthetic education.
- Home handicap management should have no straight jacket method. Most times what the handicapped persons' hands could manipulate should not be disregarded with prejudice but given a chance at possibly evolving into a corrective communication habit.

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