

Harmonising Diversity: A Descriptive Analysis of Connecting Children in South Africa through Creative Arts Education

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Abstract

Creative arts education has emerged as a global tool for promoting social cohesion among children, particularly in semi-peripheral and peripheral countries. However, South African schools, like those in other emerging nations, continue to face challenges in implementing creative arts education programmes. Limited resources, including funding, facilities, and materials, present significant obstacles to the effective delivery of these programmes, underscoring the urgent need for attention and support in this area. The purpose of this article was to explore harmonising diversity: a descriptive analysis of connecting children in South Africa through creative arts education using social identity theory (SIT) and contact theory. A qualitative research methodology was employed to analyse the role of creative arts education in connecting children in South Africa. This theoretical article used a systematic, descriptive review design to examine the influence of creative arts education on fostering social cohesion and cultural understanding among children from diverse backgrounds. The findings revealed that to unlock the full potential of creative arts education, there is a pressing need for increased investment in resources, teacher training, and curriculum development. Addressing these systemic challenges and embracing the insights from this study would enable South Africa to harness the transformative power of arts education in promoting cultural understanding, social cohesion, and positive societal change. The article concludes that creative arts education has the potential to serve as a powerful force for unity, inclusion, and nation-building in South Africa.

Keywords: agency; creative arts education; cultural understanding; empowerment; social cohesion



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Introduction

It is important to establish this article by mentioning that creative arts play an essential role in education worldwide. Numerous scholars have agreed that the technical nature of the creative arts subject offers a great opportunity to actively involve students in critical and creative thinking (Bolos, Fuentes-Pelaez, and Pastor 2017; Jansen van Vuuren 2018; Nompula 2012). This view was supported by Yende (2023a) who mentioned that the creative arts subject plays an essential role in children's learning and development. Creative arts is a form of teaching that is based on the premise that children can be engaged in the learning process through the arts in a way that may not be possible with traditional teaching techniques (Jansen van Vuuren 2018). It is a comprehensive strategy that acknowledges the value of incorporating many artistic mediums into the curriculum to support children's learning, skill development, and creative expression. In the South African context, Magagula, Mugovhani, and Yende (2022) mentioned that the creative arts subject has a distinct and cutting-edge method of teaching that integrates visual arts (including design and crafts) with dance, drama, music, and other art forms to improve the educational experience for learners, especially from grade R through grade 9.

It is important to acknowledge that several scholars have engaged extensively with the importance of the history of creative arts in South Africa and the importance of integrating it into education (Du Plessis 2013; Msila 2007). For instance, de Villiers (2015) and Nompula (2012) stated that prior to 1994, South Africa's cultural heritage was divided, and the country's educational system underwent a paradigm shift following the inauguration of democracy. The content of the South African curriculum has undergone three revisions. In 1997, it was referred to as the National Curriculum Statement. In 2002, it underwent revisions and became the Revised National Curriculum Statement. In 2011 it was revised and formalised as the Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement. Every revision was an effort to make the South African educational system better (Du Plessis 2013).

This led to the emergence of a new field of study known as Creative Arts, which integrated music, visual arts, dance, and theatre. The concept of arts-integrated learning, developed and expanded upon in the works of Mort (2023) and Nompula (2012), reflects this interdisciplinary approach. As a result of the merging of dance, theatre, visual arts, and music, all artistic disciplines were taught and studied as a single subject. Creative arts education offers a unique opportunity to address these divisions by providing children with a platform to explore, express, and celebrate their cultural heritage. Through art, music, and drama, children can communicate and connect with one another in ways that words alone cannot express (Yende 2023a). This is particularly important in a country like South Africa, where language has often been a source of division. Therefore, by engaging children in creative activities that transcend language, educators can help foster a sense of belonging and unity among students from different linguistic backgrounds.

Scholars such as Mort (2023) and Nompula (2012) ascertained that in South African education, the creative arts play a crucial part in fostering students' appreciation of culture in the classroom. Cultural appreciation is crucial in South Africa since the nation is home to a varied range of cultures, and the creative arts can help people appreciate, comprehend, and react to many facets of society's cultural fabric (Cancellieri et al. 2018). Learners who engage in creative arts are better able to comprehend and appreciate culture. Learners can gain an understanding of both their own culture and the cultures of other countries by participating in creative art classes (Mort 2023; Nompula 2012). They gain knowledge of the social environment, values, historical background, and traditions of various artistic creations. They are better able to explore their cultural heritage and recognise cross-cultural links as a result. In South Africa, where the effects of apartheid are still very much felt, the teaching of creative arts can be very important for mending old hurts and fostering a sense of shared national identity (De Villiers 2015; Nompula 2012; Yende 2023a). Educators can foster a greater understanding of the issues faced by fellow citizens and the significance of collaboration in overcoming them by offering children the opportunity to engage in creative activities that teach about the history of the country.

It is crucial to acknowledge that several scholars have written about the role and importance of creative arts education in South Africa (De Villiers 2015; Nompula 2012). Creative arts are more than just a subject; they provide a comprehensive education for students and play an important part in child development and lifetime learning (De Villiers 2015). They foster creativity, teamwork, imagination, and critical thinking skills, all of which are essential for the twenty-first century. The creative arts course provides for personal and cultural expression, as well as comprehending and analysing these manifestations and developing empathy (Magagula, Mugovhani, and Yende 2022). These studies recognise creative arts as a crucial tool for promoting social cohesion and cultural understanding.

Despite these findings, the existing literature on South African creative arts education contains numerous gaps and limitations. First, there is a scarcity of studies that have investigated the specific mechanisms by which creative arts education can promote social cohesion. Second, there are few studies that have looked at the overall function of creative arts education in addressing cultural identity and diversity issues in South Africa. Third, more realistic research is needed to investigate the usefulness of the creative arts education curriculum in encouraging and fostering interconnectedness, as well as empowering children from varied backgrounds.

The researchers were inspired by the existing gaps in the literature as well as the awareness of creative arts education's ability to build social cohesion and empower children in South Africa. This article aims to increase awareness of the value of the creative arts subject in boosting students' creativity and critical thinking, as well as to stimulate future research and development in this field. Finally, creative arts education aims to help South African communities become more inclusive and harmonious.

Research Questions

The following research questions were formulated to guide this study:

- (1) How does creative arts education contribute to cultural understanding and appreciation among children in South Africa?
- (2) What role does collaborative arts projects play in promoting social cohesion among children from diverse backgrounds?
- (3) How does creative arts education empower children to become agents of change in their communities?
- (4) What are the key challenges and barriers to implementing effective creative arts education programmes in South Africa, and how can these be addressed?

Theoretical Framework

This study adopted social identity theory (SIT) and contact theory to explore the role of creative arts education in promoting social cohesion among children in South Africa. The SIT, proposed by Tajfel and Turner (1979) and elaborated by Hogg (2016), posits that individuals derive a sense of identity and self-esteem from the groups to which they belong. This theoretical lens highlights how group membership shapes perceptions, attitudes, and behaviours, including intergroup relations. In the context of creative arts education, SIT suggests that engaging children in activities that celebrate their cultural heritage while promoting understanding of other cultures strengthens their sense of identity and belonging. A strengthened group identity can foster social cohesion, unity, and inclusivity among diverse communities (Ellemers and Haslam 2012).

Contact theory, introduced by Gordon Allport in 1954 and revisited by Pettigrew et al. (2011), suggests that structured intergroup contact under specific conditions reduces prejudice and fosters positive intergroup relations. In creative arts education, structured opportunities for collaboration among children from different cultural backgrounds allow learners to break down stereotypes, appreciate diversity, and develop cooperative skills. Collaborative projects such as music performances, visual arts, or drama productions enable children to work together, share perspectives, and respect differences, resulting in more harmonious intergroup interactions and social cohesion.

The application of these theories must be critically examined within the South African context. The education system continues to struggle with the legacy of colonialism and apartheid, which created deeply entrenched racial and socio-economic inequalities (Knaus and Brown 2015). Residential segregation and unequal access to educational resources influence the effectiveness of creative arts interventions. The SIT and contact theory were developed in contexts with less pronounced structural inequalities. The South African reality requires consideration of these complexities, not as limitations of

the theories, but as critical points for understanding how creative arts education functions in a highly racialised society.

Creative arts education provides a platform for developing empathy, respect, and intercultural understanding. Music, dance, visual arts, and drama engage children in exploring diverse cultural expressions and create inclusive learning environments (Cloete and Delport 2015). Cooperative creative projects, such as ensemble music performances, group theatrical productions, or mural painting, require learners to work toward shared goals, reflecting the mechanisms proposed by contact theory. These projects also demonstrate practical applications of SIT, fostering group identity, belonging, and social cohesion among children from diverse backgrounds.

Creative arts education encourages learners to develop social responsibility and community awareness. Research by Bushati (2018) and Chidakwa, Keru, and Khanare (2023) indicates that exploring social issues through art nurtures empathy, civic consciousness, and leadership skills. In South Africa, where historical inequities challenge social cohesion, creative arts education can cultivate children as active contributors to positive social change. Collaborative creative projects require negotiation, perspective-taking, and valuing others' contributions, aligning directly with SIT and contact theory principles concerning group dynamics, identity, and intergroup relations.

Several challenges limit the effectiveness of creative arts education in South Africa. Many schools, particularly in under-resourced communities, lack adequate facilities, materials, and trained educators, which reduces the impact of creative programmes (Mncube et al. 2023; Murtin 2013), particularly in underprivileged communities. The material nature of the arts means that many resource-constrained schools lack the facilities and materials needed to implement creative programmes effectively (Nteyi, Nomtshongwana, and Buka 2024, 284), limiting the impact of the subject (Williams 2021). Teachers often have limited exposure to well-taught arts education and lack specialist training, particularly in music education, which impedes their ability to implement integrated curricula effectively (Pooley 2016). Addressing these structural barriers is essential when theorising SIT and contact theory in the South African context. These barriers illustrate that achieving social cohesion through creative arts education requires both theoretical insight and systemic support, including teacher training and resource provision.

In conclusion, SIT and contact theory provide robust frameworks for understanding the potential of creative arts education to enhance identity, belonging, and intergroup understanding. The racialised and socio-economically stratified nature of South African society creates unique challenges for applying these theories. Connecting SIT and contact theory to local realities allows educators and researchers to explore how creative arts education can foster unity, empathy, and collaboration among children while

addressing historical inequalities. Creative arts education can thus become a transformative tool for promoting social cohesion and building an inclusive society.

Research Methodology

A qualitative research methodology was employed in this study to analyse the role of creative arts education in connecting children in South Africa. The study used a systematic, descriptive review design to examine the impact of creative arts education on social cohesion and cultural understanding among children from diverse backgrounds (Boydell et al. 2010). A qualitative approach was chosen for this article because it allows for a deep and nuanced exploration of the experiences and perspectives of children participating in creative arts education programmes (Kim, Sefcik, and Bradway 2017). This article employed a descriptive review design in an effort to present a thorough overview of the body of knowledge already available on the topic. It drew information from a variety of sources, such as government papers, periodicals, dissertations, and peer-reviewed journal articles.

Study Design and Search Strategy

This article utilised a systematic search strategy to identify relevant literature on the impact of creative arts education on social cohesion and cultural understanding in South Africa. The search was conducted using several databases, including ProQuest, EBSCOhost, LearnTechLib, JSTOR, ERIC, Google Scholar, and ResearchGate. The search strategy employed a combination of keywords and phrases related to the study's objectives, such as "creative arts education," "social cohesion," "cultural understanding," and "South Africa." The search was limited to articles published in English between the years 2000 and the date of the search. Searches were conducted between July 2021 and February 2024.

Inclusions and Exclusions

After reviewing the titles and abstracts of the identified articles, only those directly relevant to the study's objectives were included. A total of 19 articles were included in the final review (see Figure 1).

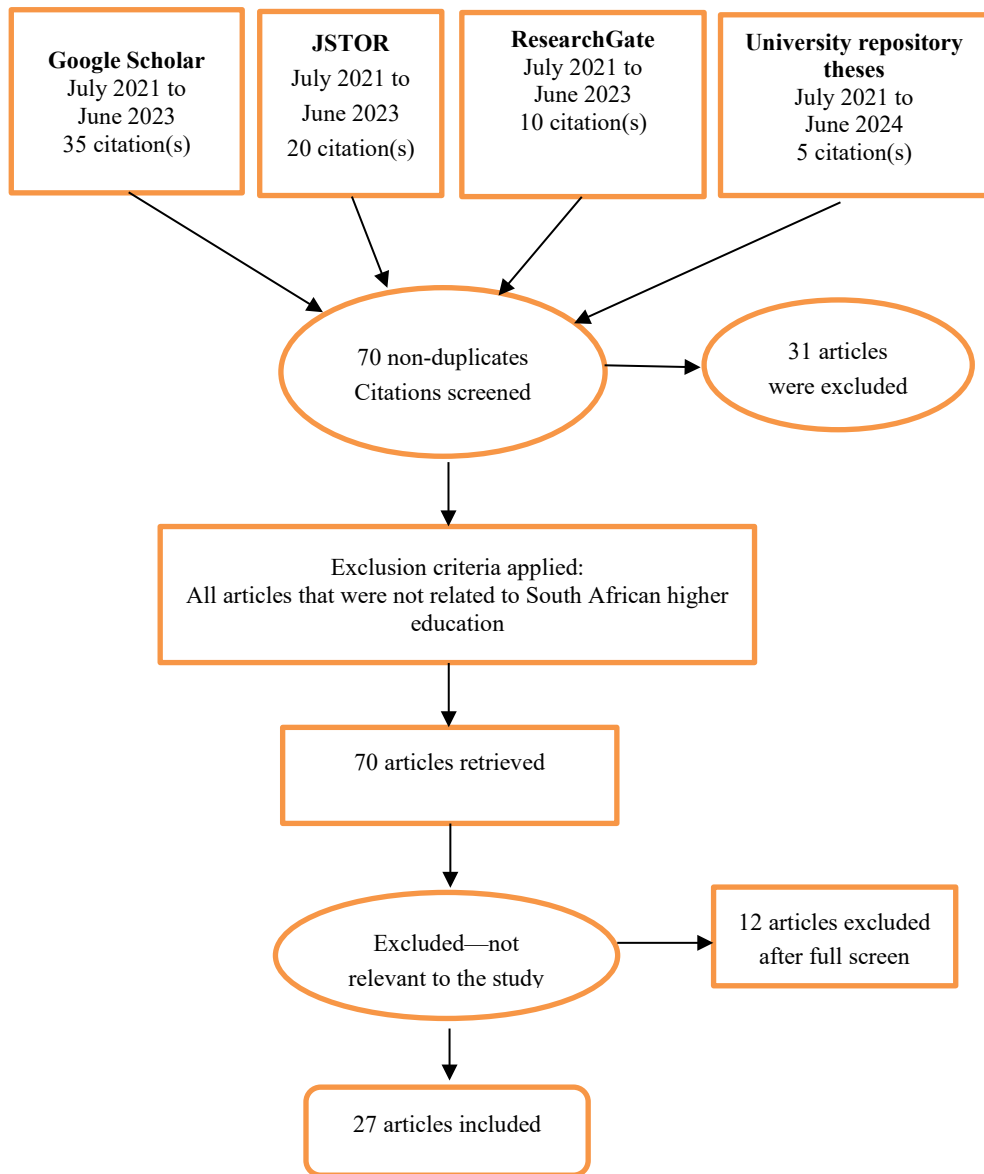


Figure 1: The literature collection process (Source: Authors)

It is necessary to mention that this methodology was chosen for this article to provide a comprehensive and detailed analysis of the role of creative arts education in connecting children in South Africa, with a focus on promoting social cohesion and cultural understanding among diverse communities. The systematic approach ensured that the study was thorough and rigorous, providing valuable insights into the potential of creative arts education to promote a more inclusive and harmonious society in South Africa.

Findings

South Africa is characterised by a rich and diverse cultural heritage, encompassing multiple languages, traditions, and artistic expressions. However, the legacy of apartheid has entrenched deep inequalities in the education system, particularly regarding access to quality creative arts education (Spaull and van der Berg 2020). Many schools, especially in resource-constrained areas, lack adequate facilities (De Villiers 2015; Nompula 2012) and trained educators to provide comprehensive arts instruction. Sayed et al. (2020, 3) report that approximately 60% of South African schools are classified as no-fee schools, placed on the lowest rung of the quintile system, which allocates school fees according to household income. Schools in higher quintiles that admit fee-exempt learners may receive block grants equivalent to the allocation for no-fee schools. National guidance for determining no-fee status relies on three poverty indicators: income, unemployment rate, and community education level. Despite these challenges, creative arts education is increasingly recognised as an essential mechanism for promoting cultural understanding and social cohesion. This study identified four key themes that emerged from the research: (1) cultural understanding and appreciation, (2) collaborative arts projects and social cohesion, (3) empowerment and agency, and (4) challenges and barriers to effective implementation.

Cultural Understanding and Appreciation

Creative arts education plays a crucial role in facilitating children's cultural heritage exploration and celebration in the South African culture. According to Yende (2023b), arts instruction gives children a forum to communicate and understand who they are culturally, encouraging a sense of pride in and a bond with their ancestry. Students have a deeper awareness of their own culture as a result of this investigation, which also inspires them to value and respect other cultures. Exposure to diverse cultural expressions through creative arts education can also cultivate empathy and respect for different cultures. Gadsden (2008) and Vermeulen (2009) underscore the role of arts education in nurturing empathy and understanding among students towards diverse cultures. By engaging with various cultural perspectives and practices, students develop a broader worldview and a deeper appreciation for the diversity of cultures.

Moreover, creative arts education instils in children the importance of valuing cultural diversity and understanding the significance of cultural preservation and promotion (Gadsden 2008; Wellman and Bey 2015; Yende 2023b). Gadsden (2008) highlights the role of arts education in advocating for cultural diversity and preservation, emphasising its contribution to a more inclusive and harmonious society. Studying many cultures helps students recognise the importance of preserving and advancing cultural legacy for future generations, in addition to helping them appreciate the distinctive qualities of each culture. In South Africa, children's development of cultural awareness and appreciation is greatly aided by creative arts education. Arts education plays a key role in promoting cultural diversity and inclusivity in society by offering a forum for cultural

exploration, cultivating empathy and respect for diverse cultures, and highlighting the importance of cultural awareness.

Collaborative Arts Projects and Social Cohesion

In South Africa, collaborative arts projects are instrumental in encouraging social bonds among children from various cultural backgrounds. These projects require children to collaborate towards a shared objective, disregarding their cultural disparities (Beukes 2016; De Villiers 2015; Mort 2023; Nompula 2012). Scholars have pointed out that collaborative arts projects offer a platform for children to value each other's contributions, nurturing a sense of teamwork and collaboration (Beukes 2016; Bowen and Kisida 2017). Through such collaborations, children learn to appreciate diverse perspectives and cultivate skills vital for teamwork in diverse environments. Moreover, cooperative creative endeavours facilitate the development of constructive connections between children. One such activity is the traditional approach to musical arts education in Africa which Nzewi (2003) points out is not about individual skills, but is traditionally a holistic and communal activity. Children form relationships based on mutual respect and trust as they cooperate to achieve a common objective. The importance of these initiatives in building strong bonds and social cohesion among children from different origins was highlighted by Bowen and Kisida (2017). Children can feel a connection to their communities and to each other through such programmes that foster a sense of togetherness and belonging. It is apparent that joint artistic endeavours are essential to improving the social cohesiveness of South African youth. These programmes help to create a sense of togetherness and belonging, which in turn helps to create a more inclusive and cohesive society by encouraging cooperation, respect for one another, and positive connections.

Empowerment and Agency

In the South African context, creative arts education serves as a potent tool for empowering children to express themselves creatively and nurture their distinct voices. Yende (2023b) emphasised that arts education in South Africa offers children the platform to delve into their creativity, honing their artistic abilities, and instilling a sense of empowerment and self-assurance. Children who express themselves artistically learn new and meaningful methods to communicate their ideas and feelings, which helps them feel more in control of their inner selves (Nompula 2012). Additionally, children in South Africa who get creative arts education are prepared to use art as a tool for advocacy and self-expression (Beukes 2016; Cloete and Delport 2015). Children learn how to use their voices as catalysts for community influence via making art that addresses social concerns and promotes positive change. Yende (2023b) emphasised the way in which arts education encourages social involvement in South African youth, highlighting the significance of art in generating consciousness and inciting action.

Participation in creative activities also cultivates vital life skills in South African children, including confidence, leadership, and problem-solving abilities. Cloete and

Delpont (2015) and Nompula (2012) stress the significance of arts education in nurturing these skills, noting that children who engage in creative endeavours are more inclined to assume leadership positions and actively contribute to their communities' development. Creative arts education gives South African children the tools they need to become self-assured, socially conscious adults who can make a good difference in their communities by encouraging a culture of creativity and self-expression.

Challenges and Barriers to Effective Implementation

In the South African context, several challenges affect the effective implementation of creative arts education programmes (Cloete and Delpont 2015; Yende 2023a). Although it is commonly stated that South African schools lack resources, it is important to provide evidence and avoid overgeneralisation. Research indicates that disparities exist across different regions and types of schools. Ajani (2023) highlights that school resources critically influence the quality of education, as adequate resources enable teachers to deliver the curriculum effectively and enhance learners' academic performance. Khethiwe (2023) further notes that social inequalities disproportionately affect learners in rural schools, where funding, facilities, and materials are often insufficient.

Historical factors continue to shape the distribution of resources. Mabula, Khalabai, and Simeon (2023) argue that inequalities in educational provision can be traced back to the apartheid era, with white-dominated schools historically receiving more support than black-dominated schools in rural and peri-urban areas. These historical disparities continue to influence access to educational materials, creative arts facilities, and qualified educators. Yende (2023a) emphasises that resource availability is particularly important in creative arts education, as students require specific tools, instruments, and materials to participate meaningfully in artistic activities. Inadequate resources significantly limit the potential impact of creative arts programmes.

Another challenge relates to the training and preparedness of educators. Many teachers feel insufficiently equipped to deliver creative arts education owing to limited professional development opportunities and inadequate support (Magagula, Mugovhani and Yende 2022). This lack of training affects teachers' confidence and the quality of instruction, thereby reducing student engagement. Educators who are unfamiliar with creative arts pedagogies may struggle to integrate music, visual arts, and drama into their teaching, limiting the benefits of these programmes. Cultural factors also influence the implementation of creative arts education. In some communities, societal norms and traditional beliefs may discourage creative expression or reduce the perceived relevance of arts education (Yende 2023a). Resistance to change and adherence to conventional teaching methods may impede the adoption of creative arts programmes in certain schools. Acknowledging the role of cultural perceptions is essential for designing interventions that are contextually appropriate and socially accepted.

Addressing these challenges requires targeted interventions. Providing adequate resources, including funding, facilities, and materials, alongside professional development for teachers, can enhance the delivery of creative arts education. Engaging communities and raising awareness of the benefits of creative arts for children's cognitive, social, and emotional development can also help to overcome cultural resistance. Recognising the diversity of South African schools, policies and programmes should avoid blanket statements about resource shortages and instead consider local contexts, ensuring equitable support for schools that are most in need. Creative arts education in South Africa faces challenges relating to resource disparities, educator preparedness, and cultural attitudes. Understanding the historical, social, and regional factors that influence resource allocation and programme implementation allows for a nuanced approach to these challenges and highlights areas for targeted intervention to support inclusive and effective creative arts education.

Discussion

This study examined the transformative potential of creative arts education in South Africa, drawing on SIT and contact theory to understand how engagement in the arts can influence children's identity, social relationships, and cultural understanding. The findings highlight that creative arts education can significantly contribute to children's personal development, intergroup understanding, and community engagement.

Creative arts education provides a platform for children to develop a sense of identity and belonging. According to SIT, individuals derive self-esteem and social identity from the groups to which they belong (Hogg 2016). In educational settings, activities that celebrate learners' cultural heritage while introducing them to other cultures can strengthen their social identity, increasing their sense of belonging within diverse groups (Ellemers and Haslam 2012). This process enables children to understand their own identities while developing respect and appreciation for the identities of others. Through music, dance, drama, and visual arts, learners can experience cultural narratives that promote empathy, understanding, and mutual respect. Such experiences contribute to more inclusive classrooms where children feel valued and recognised for their contributions.

Collaborative arts projects were identified as an effective mechanism for encouraging constructive intergroup engagement. According to contact theory, structured interaction between individuals from different groups can reduce prejudice and enhance positive relationships (Pettigrew et al. 2011). In the context of creative arts education, children participating in ensemble music, group theatre, or shared art projects learn to cooperate, negotiate, and value the perspectives and contributions of their peers. These interactions foster skills such as teamwork, communication, and collective problem-solving, which are essential for social development and mutual understanding. The findings demonstrate that collaborative arts projects provide practical opportunities for children

to engage across cultural differences, enhancing interpersonal skills while promoting inclusive attitudes.

The study also emphasised the role of creative arts education in nurturing agency and self-expression. Participation in arts activities enables children to explore their ideas, emotions, and perspectives in constructive ways. Research indicates that engagement in creative processes can encourage learners to reflect critically on societal issues, promoting active citizenship and community involvement (Bushati 2018; Yende 2023b). SIT suggests that such activities enhance self-esteem and reinforce a positive sense of identity, as children recognise their capacity to contribute meaningfully to their communities (Ellemers and Haslam 2012). Through arts-based projects, children gain confidence in expressing themselves while cultivating empathy and awareness of social diversity.

While the benefits of creative arts education are evident, the study also highlights significant challenges related to resources, teacher preparation, and cultural perceptions. It is important to note that not all South African schools lack resources. Many urban and well-funded schools possess adequate facilities, materials, and trained staff to deliver high-quality creative arts education. However, disparities exist, particularly in rural and historically disadvantaged areas, where limited funding and infrastructure restrict access to arts education (Ajani 2023; Khethiwe 2023). Historical inequalities rooted in the apartheid era continue to shape resource allocation, resulting in uneven provision of materials, instruments, and specialised educators across the country (Jansen 2019; Mabula, Khalabai, and Simeon 2023). These structural inequalities must be considered when designing and implementing creative arts programmes, ensuring that interventions are targeted to support schools with fewer resources without overstating the situation for all schools.

Teacher preparedness emerged as another critical factor influencing the effectiveness of creative arts education. Many teachers feel insufficiently equipped to integrate arts activities into their teaching due to limited professional development opportunities and inadequate support (Magagula, Mugovhani, and Yende 2022). The findings indicate that professional development and ongoing support are essential to enable teachers to facilitate creative learning effectively. Well-prepared educators are better positioned to guide students through collaborative projects, cultural explorations, and self-expression activities, thereby maximising the potential of arts education to support social, cognitive, and emotional growth.

Cultural norms and community perceptions also influence the implementation of creative arts programmes. In some contexts, societal expectations or traditional beliefs may discourage engagement with certain forms of arts education (Yende 2023a). Addressing these cultural considerations is crucial for fostering acceptance and participation, and schools must engage with communities to build understanding of the value of creative arts for holistic education.

In conclusion, this study underscores the potential of creative arts education to enhance children's identity, social skills, and cultural awareness while highlighting the uneven distribution of resources and the importance of teacher preparedness and cultural engagement. The findings suggest that targeted investment in infrastructure, teacher training, and community engagement is necessary to ensure equitable access to arts education across South African schools. Such measures will allow creative arts education to reach its full potential in supporting inclusive, culturally aware, and socially competent learners.

Conclusion

This article reports on a study that set out to explore and identify how creative arts education can foster social cohesion among children in South Africa. Specific focus was placed on examining the role of creative arts in enhancing cultural understanding, promoting collaboration, and empowering children within diverse educational contexts. The study looked broadly at the implementation of creative arts programmes in South African schools and recognised that such education has emerged as a powerful mechanism for promoting unity and inclusion. Through the theoretical frameworks of social identity theory and contact theory, the study investigated how creative arts education can facilitate meaningful engagement across cultural divides and address the challenges associated with its implementation.

Social cohesion is underpinned by cultural appreciation and mutual understanding. Creative arts education provides children with opportunities to explore and value their cultural heritage, nurturing a sense of pride and connection to their origins. Engagement with a variety of cultural expressions cultivates empathy and respect for others, supporting the development of an inclusive society. Collaborative artistic projects require children from different backgrounds to work together, reinforcing social cohesion through shared purpose, trust, and collective effort. Participation in joint creative endeavours fosters a sense of belonging and shared identity, bridging social and cultural divides within educational settings. Empowerment and agency represent critical outcomes of creative arts education. Enabling children to use creative activities as a medium for self-expression allows them to address social issues and contribute positively to their communities. This process enhances self-confidence, leadership, and a sense of responsibility, equipping children with the skills to participate actively in societal development. Creative arts education also fosters the development of competencies essential for active citizenship and sustained community engagement.

Despite its potential, the implementation of creative arts education faces significant challenges. Limited funding, inadequate facilities, and insufficient teaching resources impede the delivery of high-quality programmes. In addition, educators often lack specialised training to integrate creative approaches effectively into curricula. Addressing these barriers requires targeted investment in resources and professional development to maximise the benefits of creative arts education. The transformative

potential of creative arts education is further enhanced when children engage with their cultural traditions while interacting with peers from diverse backgrounds. Exposure to different cultural perspectives nurtures understanding, respect, and a shared sense of identity. The integration of digital technologies can also expand the scope and impact of creative arts education. Digital tools facilitate collaboration, innovation, and cultural exchange, providing children with novel avenues for self-expression and engagement with broader social networks.

In conclusion, creative arts education has substantial potential as a vehicle for social cohesion and unity in South Africa. Promoting cultural appreciation, fostering collaboration, empowering children, addressing resource and training limitations, and incorporating digital technologies collectively contribute to building a more inclusive and connected society. Sustained investment in creative arts education enables South Africa to harness the transformative power of the arts, enhancing social cohesion, cultural understanding, and the development of responsible, engaged young citizens, ultimately contributing to a more resilient and inclusive future.

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