Combating COVID-19 in Ghana using socio-pedagogical methods: educational campaign through children’s arts

Esmeranda Manful1, Nelson Gyasi-Boadu1, Mavis Osei2, Katrin Luise Laezer3

1Sociology and Social Work, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi, Ghana
2Educational Innovations in Science and Technology, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi, Ghana
3Social Work, University of Applied Sciences, Darmstadt, Germany

Abstract

Background: This brief report presents an action research project that was conducted in 2020 to contribute to approaches to ensure adherence to COVID-19 health protocols by children in Ghana. The research was on the basis that when adults allow children to share the burden of finding effective measures to the adherence of COVID-19 health protocols, the spread of the virus will be contained, which would also ensure the safety of children.

Method: The action research was designed to be socially engaging, therefore a qualitative approach using Arts-Based-Research was adopted. Arts, as a socio-pedagogical method, was used as a tool to engage 189 children, between the ages of 4 and 15 years, in art workshops in Kumasi, Ghana's second-largest city. The children, from different socioeconomic backgrounds, were aided by Art Assistants to handle the different art materials.

Results: The different artistic depiction of children on COVID-19 suggests that the awareness created had reached many children irrespective of their socioeconomic background. However, how it was portrayed by the child participants introduced a fun aspect enabling the art materials to be used for advocacy.

Conclusion: The medium, children’s art, used was innovative and caught the attention of children and adults alike, hence the art materials were effective advocacy materials. Also, the flexibility of the project design enabled the researchers to adapt the outputs to suit the rapidly evolving COVID-19 issues in the country to make the project more effective.

Keywords

children, COVID-19, socio-pedagogical method, Ghana
Corresponding author: Esmeranda Manful (emanful.cass@knust.edu.gh)

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Introduction

During the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, specifically on 25th October 2020, 47,690 confirmed cases of COVID-19 had been recorded including 316 deaths in Ghana (Worldometer, n.d.). Most of the reported cases were concentrated in the two largest cities, Accra and Kumasi. Public health officials recommended extraordinary measures to combat the spread of the virus including social distancing, hand washing and wearing of face masks as the prime strategies (Kenu, Frimpong, & Koram, 2020). But many challenges remained; therefore, there was an urgent need for innovative ideas and solutions on how to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic as well as potential future crisis. Although Ghana’s rate of infection was reportedly low (Agbozo & Jahn, 2021), in the public narrative on how to combat the disease, children lived experience with the new way of life was largely absent. Yet, parents, teachers and policymakers were busily looking for solutions to ensure children and young people were not infected with the virus but had failed to address their social behaviours in public spaces such as the markets, public transport and playing fields. Furthermore, as a result of the pandemic, all primary schools were closed in March 2020 (Ministry of Education, 2020), impacting the ‘normal’ relationships of young children with their peers and within the larger community (OECD, 2020).

The main problem this project sought to address was how best to engage children in adhering to the prescribed health protocols to prevent the spread of COVID-19. However, at the time of the research, there were almost no public campaigns focusing on children in Ghana. Therefore, this project aimed to collect art material and put together a pictorial presentation in which children themselves through artistic means could find a voice and speak out and share their experiences of COVID-19 and their adherence to the prescribed health protocols. The strategy was to use art to elicit their views and then use the art for educational campaigns. In addition, it was anticipated that the activities would be replicated in different communities where children would hopefully be advocates of the adherence to the health protocols through the medium of art. Hence, using art as a socio-pedagogical method informed by the pragmatic theory of education was the basis of this project. This is because, pragmatism is about engaging in practical things, and that was what this project was about; engaging the children in art as a means of advocacy and education whilst they experiment with art and creativity.

Methods

The research was designed to be socially engaging since the main aim was to use art to elicit children’s views and then use the arts for educational campaigns. Therefore, a qualitative approach using Arts-Based-Research (ABR) was adopted. ABR is a method that involves the researcher interacting with their participants through arts-related activities (Morris & Paris, 2022). Thirteen Art Assistants assisted the child participants to engage in the various activities during the workshops. The Research Assistants were graduates from two different disciplines, Arts and Social Work.

For this study, 189 children (ages ranging from 4 years to 15 years) from diverse socio-economic backgrounds participated in art-based workshops to present their understanding of COVID-19, how it spread and prevented. The art materials provided were A4 cards, clay dough, colour pencils, crayons and postal colours.

The project was conducted between 16th November and 31st December 2020 at five different venues in Kumasi, Ghana’s second largest city. Specifically, Kumasi Children’s Home, Safe-Child Advocacy (SCA), St. Louise Vocational Training Center (VTC), King Jesus Charity Home (KJCH) and Centre for Cultural and African Studies (CeCAST), KNUST. Each child participated in a one-day workshop. A brief description of each workshop venue is as follows.

Kumasi Children’s Home (KCH)
Kumasi Children’s Home (KCH) is a state-managed orphanage in Kumasi, Ashanti region and was established in 1965 by the Department of Social Welfare. This Home provides residential care for young children, both males and females, who need alternative care. At the time of the study, there were more than 150 children in the Home.

Safe-Child advocacy (SCA)
Safe-Child Advocacy (SCA) formally known as Street Children Project, assists street children in Kumasi in achieving a better life and a better future. This agency was established and is managed by the Catholic Archdiocese of Kumasi and the Daughters of Charity Saint Vincent Paul respectively. This agency is located at Roman Hill, Kumasi and one of its objectives is to serve as a place for day respite for local children with unstable living circumstances.

St. Louise Vocational Training Center (VTC)
St. Louise Vocational Training Center (VTC) is an offshoot of Street Children Project, managed by the Catholic Archdiocese of Kumasi in Ghana. VTC is located in Appiadu, a suburb of Kumasi. The VTC was established in 2013 to help young girls either living on the street or at risk of homelessness, by providing them with opportunities to learn employment skills (such as dressmaking, hairdressing, and catering) of their own choice.
King Jesus Charity Home (KJCH)
King Jesus Charity Home (KJCH) in Kumasi, previously King Jesus Orphanage, was also one of the venues for the workshop. KJCH is a Christian Charitable Educational Centre that takes care of vulnerable children such as homeless children and at-risk youth. The residential facility also gives free basic education to children in their care. KJCH also provides vocational training to those who need it, through workshops on matters such as hairdressing, dressmaking and T.V and radio repairs.

Centre for Cultural and African Studies (CeCAST), KNUST
The four previous venues targeted specific vulnerable groups in the city of Kumasi, however, for the last venue the target was the general public. To ensure the COVID-19 health guidelines at the time of the study were adhered to (Kenu, Frimpong, & Koram, 2020), the team had to ensure the possibility of an effective contact tracing system, in case there was an outbreak during the art workshops. Therefore, the decision was taken to only allow those in the University community and its environs to participate in the public workshops. The workshops were held at the Centre for Cultural and African Studies (CeCAST), KNUST. Posters and adverts in print and on WhatsApp group pages were put up within the university and its environs.

Child participants
A total of 189 children attended the workshops. The participants ranged between the ages of 4 and 15 years. Out of the total participants, 21 of them were below 6 years, 84 participants were 6 to 12 years and 66 participants were above 12 years. However, 18 participants were unable to provide their ages. The children were recruited through advertisements using flyers, banners and WhatsApp group pages. The eligibility criteria for participating were for a child to be associated with the five venues, be between 4 and 15 years, and have a completed consent form from a parent or guardian.

Activities at the art workshops
The children were engaged in several activities at the art workshops; these included an art icebreaker, a depiction of COVID-19, a depiction of how COVID-19 spreads, and how COVID-19 can be prevented. Then they were taken through how to make a face mask with two strings and a handkerchief.

Activity 1: Art icebreaker
The ice breaker was to allow children to become familiar with the art materials available at each respective workshop. Below is an example of an ice-breaker drawn.

Figure 1. Participant’s ice breaker art.

Activity 2: Depiction of COVID-19
Subsequently, after the first activity, participants were tasked to depict what COVID-19 looks like, either through drawing, clay making or painting. They were allowed to use any of the materials or colours of their choice to design whatever they had sketched or created. Below is a depiction from one of the children using multiple materials.
Another picture below is an example of a drawing using pencil and postal colours.

Figure 2a. Participants’ depiction of COVID-19.

Activity 3: How COVID-19 spreads
This activity also required children to demonstrate through the use of art materials how COVID-19 spreads. These activities were for the children to demonstrate if they knew how the virus was transmitted and the mode of transmission. The art produced by the children depicted coughing, shaking of hands, the habit of not wearing a face mask and physical contact with those infected.

Figure 2b. Participant's depiction of COVID-19.

Figure 3a. Artwork of a participant showing how COVID-19 spreads through a cough.
Another child depicted how the virus is spread through holding of hands in the picture below:

![Image of a drawing showing the spread of COVID-19 through holding hands]

**Figure 3b.** Artwork of a participant showing how COVID-19 spreads through holding of hands and not observing social distancing.

**Activity 4: How the spread of COVID-19 can be prevented**

This activity required children to use art materials to depict how COVID-19 can be prevented from spreading from one person to the other. The participants’ art mainly focused on the wearing of face masks and practising social distancing protocols.

![Image of a drawing showing COVID-19 prevention in a vehicle]

**Figure 4a.** Artwork showing how COVID-19 can be prevented whilst in a vehicle.
Activity 5: Making face masks

The child participants at all the venues were allowed to make their face masks with a piece of fabric and two strings. The children were taken through the process by the Art Assistants.

Findings

The action research using ABR was very engaging. It was child friendly, consequently creating a good atmosphere for the children to spontaneously express their feelings, and most importantly; shared their awareness and perception on COVID-19. It was also noticed that all of the child participants knew something about COVID-19 which included; how it spreads, symptoms and preventive measures. The different artistic depiction by children of COVID-19 health protocols suggests that the awareness created had reached many children irrespective of their socioeconomic background. However, how it was portrayed by the child participants introduced a fun aspect enabling the art materials to be used for advocacy.

The advocacy materials developed as outputs of the research project included video documentary, which was aired and is available on the platform of one of Ghana’s leading broadcasting stations, also on social media, specifically YouTube (and it was listed in the timeline of the COVID-19 pandemic in Ghana). In addition, a Children’s Art brochure depicting the arts of the children from all the venues and a two-page brochure highlighting some of the children’s artwork including steps on how to make a face mask was developed for public schools in the Ashanti Region.

Conclusion

In January 2021, all schools in Ghana were asked to reopen (G.E.S., 2021). Therefore, the educational campaign was timely and relevant to complement efforts to educate Ghana’s population, especially children to adhere to COVID-19 health protocols. The medium, children’s art, used was engaging and innovative; children and adults alike were drawn to the artwork educational campaign. Also, the flexibility of the project design enabled the researchers to adapt the outputs to suit the rapidly evolving COVID-19 issues in the country to make the project more effective.

Further, the project met one of the objectives of the main project “Educational partnership in socio-pedagogical methods in social work towards improving the lives of Ghanaian children”, by using different methods in improving the lives of children in the country. Further, within the project, the Art Assistants were past Social Work students and students who studied Art-related disciplines. These two disciplines, who naturally in Ghana do not work together, were exposed to how they could team up to ensure the wellbeing of children. Therefore, at the end of the project how art could be used in working with children was demonstrated effectively.

Data availability

No data are associated with this article.
References


Reference Source
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