



Creative Expression as an Emotional Scaffold: Alleviating Affective Barriers in Second Language Acquisition in Tertiary Institutions

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Abstract. Affective barriers such as anxiety, fear of negative evaluation, low self-confidence, and communication apprehension continue to hinder effective second language acquisition among students in tertiary institutions. This study examined creative expression as an emotional scaffold for alleviating affective barriers in second language acquisition among undergraduate students in selected Nigerian tertiary institutions, including the University of Lagos, University of Ibadan, and Federal College of Education, Abeokuta. The study adopted a mixed-methods descriptive survey design involving 240 undergraduate students studying French, English, Arabic, and other language-related courses. Data were collected through structured questionnaires and semi-structured interviews, while quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and qualitative responses were thematically analyzed. Findings revealed that creative expression through drama, music, storytelling, poetry, role-play, painting, and digital creative activities significantly reduced learners' anxiety levels and improved emotional engagement during language learning processes. Students reported increased classroom participation, enhanced communication confidence, improved pronunciation practice, and greater willingness to interact in the target language. The findings further indicated that creative arts activities fostered collaborative learning environments that minimized fear of making mistakes and encouraged spontaneous language use. Despite these positive outcomes, challenges such as inadequate instructional resources, insufficient lecturer training, rigid curriculum structures, and limited institutional support affected the effective implementation of arts-based language pedagogies. The study concludes that creative expression functions as an important emotional scaffold capable of supporting learners psychologically and academically during second language acquisition. It therefore recommends the integration of arts-based pedagogical approaches into tertiary language

curricula, professional training for language educators in creative instructional methods, and increased institutional support for interdisciplinary teaching practices.

Keywords: Creative expression, emotional scaffold, affective barriers, second language acquisition, arts-based pedagogy, tertiary institutions

1. Introduction

The increasing globalization of education, commerce, diplomacy, and technology has made second language acquisition an essential component of higher education across the world. In multilingual societies such as Nigeria, proficiency in additional languages has become increasingly important for intercultural communication, academic advancement, international mobility, and professional competitiveness. Consequently, tertiary institution students are encouraged to acquire competence not only in English but also in foreign and indigenous languages such as French, Arabic, Chinese, Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba. However, despite the growing importance of multilingual competence, many learners encounter emotional and psychological barriers that hinder effective language acquisition.

Research in second language acquisition has consistently shown that emotional variables significantly influence language learning outcomes. Krashen (1982), in his Affective Filter Hypothesis, argued that "performers with high motivation and self-confidence and a good self-image, and a low level of anxiety are better equipped for success in second language acquisition" (p. 31). This implies that learners' emotional states directly affect their ability to internalize and produce language effectively. When learners experience fear, tension, embarrassment, or low self-confidence, their

affective filters become elevated, thereby obstructing meaningful language acquisition.

Among the various emotional factors affecting language learning, anxiety remains one of the most widely studied and influential. Horwitz et al. (1986) defined foreign language anxiety as “a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process” (p. 128). This form of anxiety often manifests through nervousness during oral communication, fear of negative evaluation, reluctance to participate in classroom interaction, and apprehension toward pronunciation exercises and public speaking tasks. MacIntyre and Gardner (1994) further explained that language anxiety “can interfere with the cognitive processing of language input, retention, and production” (p. 284), thereby limiting learners’ communicative competence and academic performance.

In many Nigerian tertiary institutions, second language instruction is still largely characterized by traditional teacher-centered pedagogies that emphasize grammatical accuracy, memorization, and formal testing. Although these methods may support theoretical language knowledge, they often create highly evaluative classroom environments that intensify learners’ fear of making mistakes. Students frequently perceive language classrooms as spaces where errors are criticized rather than viewed as part of the learning process. Such experiences may weaken learners’ confidence and reduce their willingness to communicate in the target language.

The importance of emotional support in learning environments has therefore become a central concern in contemporary educational discourse. Vygotsky (1978) emphasized that learning is fundamentally social and occurs through supportive interactions within culturally meaningful contexts. According to Vygotsky, “what a child can do with assistance today she will be able to do by herself tomorrow” (p. 87). This perspective highlights the importance of scaffolding in facilitating learning processes. Building on this idea, emotional scaffolding refers to instructional practices that provide emotional encouragement, psychological safety, and supportive engagement to learners during academic activities (Rosiek, 2003). Emotional scaffolding is particularly relevant in second language acquisition because language learning often exposes learners to vulnerability, self-consciousness, and fear of public mistakes.

Within this framework, creative expression through the arts has emerged as a potentially transformative pedagogical strategy capable of reducing affective barriers in language learning environments. Creative

expression involves the use of imaginative and artistic activities such as drama, storytelling, poetry, music, dance, painting, digital media creation, and role-play to communicate ideas, emotions, and experiences. Arts-based pedagogies encourage participation, experimentation, collaboration, and self-expression, thereby creating emotionally supportive learning spaces that may alleviate anxiety and improve learner confidence.

Eisner (2002) argued that “the arts teach children that problems can have more than one solution and that questions can have more than one answer” (p. 70). This flexibility and openness inherent in artistic engagement may reduce learners’ fear of failure by shifting attention away from rigid linguistic perfection toward creative communication and meaning-making. Similarly, Greene (1995) maintained that the arts enable learners to “release imagination” and develop deeper personal engagement with learning experiences (p. 19). Through creative participation, learners are able to explore language in less threatening and more emotionally supportive contexts.

Drama-based activities, in particular, have been recognized as effective tools for reducing anxiety in language classrooms. Maley and Duff (2005) observed that drama “helps learners to develop emotional intelligence, self-awareness, confidence, spontaneity, and social interaction skills” (p. 6). Through role-play and performance, students can practice language naturally while temporarily distancing themselves from personal fear and self-consciousness. Likewise, music and poetry have been associated with emotional relaxation, memory retention, and pronunciation improvement. According to Medina (2002), music facilitates language learning by enhancing “motivation, memory, attention, and emotional engagement” (p. 3).

Recent scholarship has increasingly emphasized the relationship between positive emotional experiences and successful language acquisition. Gregersen and MacIntyre (2014) argued that “language teachers need to focus not only on reducing negative emotions but also on building positive emotional experiences that foster resilience and confidence” (p. 12). This suggests that emotionally responsive pedagogies can contribute significantly to learners’ communicative competence and psychological well-being. Creative expression offers opportunities for such emotionally enriching experiences by encouraging collaborative participation and reducing the fear associated with formal classroom communication.

In the Nigerian educational context, some tertiary institutions have begun integrating creative arts

activities into second language instruction. At the University of Lagos, French language lecturers have reportedly incorporated drama and role-play into oral communication classes to improve students' fluency and classroom participation. Similarly, storytelling and poetry recitation have been used at the University of Ibadan to encourage pronunciation practice and learner interaction. At the Federal College of Education, Abeokuta, collaborative music performances and digital creative presentations have been introduced in selected language courses to enhance students' emotional engagement and confidence during communication exercises. These practical examples indicate growing recognition of arts-based pedagogies as supportive instructional approaches within Nigerian tertiary education.

Despite increasing scholarly attention to learner-centered pedagogies, empirical studies examining creative expression specifically as an emotional scaffold for alleviating affective barriers in second language acquisition remain relatively limited, particularly in African higher education contexts. Most existing studies have examined language anxiety, communicative competence, or arts-based learning independently, with insufficient attention given to the intersection between creative expression, emotional support, and second language acquisition. This gap underscores the need for further empirical investigation into how creative expression can support learners emotionally while enhancing language acquisition processes in tertiary institutions.

This study therefore investigates creative expression as an emotional scaffold for alleviating affective barriers in second language acquisition among students in selected Nigerian tertiary institutions. Specifically, the study examines the forms of creative expression used in second language classrooms, explores their influence on learners' emotional experiences, and assesses their effectiveness in reducing anxiety and promoting communicative confidence during language learning activities.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Second language acquisition continues to pose significant challenges for many students in Nigerian tertiary institutions despite the growing importance of multilingual competence in contemporary education and global communication. Although students are encouraged to study foreign and indigenous languages for academic, professional, and intercultural purposes, many learners experience emotional and psychological difficulties that negatively affect their language learning experiences. Anxiety, fear of making mistakes, low

self-confidence, communication apprehension, and fear of negative evaluation often prevent students from participating actively in classroom interactions and oral communication activities.

In many tertiary institutions, second language instruction still relies heavily on conventional teaching approaches that emphasize grammatical accuracy, rote memorization, written exercises, and formal assessment. While these approaches may contribute to theoretical understanding of language structures, they often fail to create emotionally supportive and interactive learning environments capable of addressing learners' affective needs. As a result, students frequently become passive participants in language classrooms and develop negative attitudes toward second language learning.

Furthermore, many language classrooms provide limited opportunities for creative participation, collaborative interaction, and self-expression. Learners are often evaluated primarily on correctness rather than communicative engagement, thereby increasing classroom tension and reducing learners' willingness to experiment with language use. This situation contributes to persistent affective barriers that hinder effective language acquisition and communication competence among students.

Recent educational practices increasingly emphasize the importance of learner-centered pedagogies that support both cognitive and emotional development. Creative expression through activities such as drama, storytelling, music, poetry, role-play, drawing, and digital media creation has shown potential for promoting learner engagement, confidence, and emotional comfort in educational settings. However, despite the growing relevance of arts-based instructional approaches globally, their integration into second language teaching within Nigerian tertiary institutions remains limited.

In addition, existing studies within the Nigerian educational context have focused largely on second language anxiety, language performance, and teaching methodologies without giving sufficient attention to the role of creative expression as an emotional scaffold for reducing affective barriers in second language acquisition. There is therefore inadequate empirical evidence on how arts-based creative activities can support learners emotionally and improve their participation, confidence, and communication experiences during language learning processes in tertiary institutions.

This study therefore seeks to fill this gap by investigating creative expression as an emotional scaffold for alleviating affective barriers in second language acquisition among students in selected

Nigerian tertiary institutions. The study aims to provide empirical evidence on the effectiveness of arts-based creative practices in reducing anxiety and enhancing learners' emotional engagement and communicative confidence in second language classrooms.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to investigate creative expression as an emotional scaffold for alleviating affective barriers in second language acquisition among students in selected Nigerian tertiary institutions.

The specific objectives are to;

- examine the nature and extent of affective barriers experienced by students during second language acquisition in tertiary institutions.
- identify the various forms of creative expression used in second language learning among students in selected Nigerian tertiary institutions.
- determine the influence of creative expression on reducing anxiety and communication apprehension among second language learners.
- examine the extent to which creative expression enhances learners' confidence, motivation, and participation in second language classrooms.
- investigate students' perceptions of arts-based instructional strategies in second language acquisition.
- identify the challenges associated with integrating creative expression into second language teaching and learning in tertiary institutions.

1.3 Research Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were formulated to guide the study and tested at 0.05 level of significance:

H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between creative expression and the reduction of affective barriers among second language learners in tertiary institutions.

H₀₂: Creative expression does not significantly influence students' confidence and participation in second language classrooms.

H₀₃: There is no significant difference in the anxiety levels of students exposed to arts-based instructional strategies and those taught through conventional teaching methods in second language acquisition.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Concept of Second Language Acquisition

Second language acquisition refers to the process through which individuals learn a language other than their native or first language. It involves the development of listening, speaking, reading, and writing competencies in the target language through formal instruction, interaction, and exposure. Second language acquisition has become increasingly important in contemporary education due to globalization, migration, intercultural communication, and international academic mobility.

Ellis (1997) described second language acquisition as the way in which people learn a language "other than their mother tongue, inside or outside of a classroom" (p. 3). This process is influenced by cognitive, social, emotional, environmental, and pedagogical factors. Similarly, Lightbown and Spada (2013) noted that successful language acquisition depends not only on intellectual ability but also on learners' motivation, confidence, emotional state, and opportunities for meaningful interaction.

In multilingual societies such as Nigeria, second language acquisition plays an essential role in educational advancement and social integration. Nigerian tertiary institutions offer courses in foreign languages such as French, Arabic, and Chinese alongside indigenous languages and English language studies. However, many students experience difficulties in oral communication and classroom participation due to emotional barriers associated with language learning. These challenges have increased scholarly interest in pedagogical strategies capable of supporting learners emotionally while enhancing language competence.

2.2 Affective Barriers in Second Language Acquisition

Affective barriers refer to emotional and psychological factors that interfere with effective learning processes. In second language acquisition, affective barriers commonly include anxiety, fear of negative evaluation, low self-esteem, communication apprehension, lack of motivation, and fear of making mistakes. These emotional challenges can reduce learners' willingness to participate actively in classroom interactions and negatively affect language performance.

Krashen's (1982) Affective Filter Hypothesis remains one of the most influential explanations of the relationship between emotion and language acquisition. Krashen argued that learners with low

motivation, low self-confidence, and high anxiety are less likely to process language input effectively because emotional tension acts as a mental filter that blocks acquisition. According to Krashen, emotional variables may either facilitate or hinder language learning depending on the learning environment and learners' psychological conditions.

Foreign language anxiety has been identified as one of the most significant affective barriers in language learning. Horwitz et al. (1986) explained that language anxiety is associated with learners' self-perceptions, beliefs, and emotional reactions within classroom settings. Learners experiencing language anxiety often avoid speaking activities, fear public embarrassment, and become reluctant to communicate in the target language.

MacIntyre and Gardner (1994) further observed that language anxiety affects cognitive processing by interfering with learners' ability to retain vocabulary, comprehend messages, and produce language effectively. Anxiety may therefore weaken both academic performance and communicative competence. In many tertiary institutions, students experience heightened anxiety during oral presentations, pronunciation exercises, and spontaneous conversations because they fear criticism from lecturers and peers.

Research within Nigerian educational contexts has similarly shown that affective barriers significantly influence language learning outcomes. Many students perceive second language classrooms as intimidating environments where mistakes are associated with ridicule or poor academic judgment. This perception often discourages learners from participating actively during classroom communication exercises.

2.3 Concept of Creative Expression

Creative expression refers to the use of imagination, artistic activities, and innovative forms of communication to express thoughts, emotions, experiences, and ideas. It encompasses activities such as drama, storytelling, music, dance, poetry, painting, drawing, role-play, and digital media creation. Creative expression encourages experimentation, collaboration, emotional engagement, and self-discovery within learning environments.

Eisner (2002) emphasized that the arts contribute significantly to human understanding by encouraging imagination, interpretation, emotional sensitivity, and reflective thinking. According to Eisner, artistic experiences enable learners to explore multiple perspectives and develop flexible ways of thinking. Similarly, Greene (1995) argued

that creative activities stimulate imagination and help learners engage more meaningfully with educational experiences.

Within educational contexts, creative expression promotes active participation rather than passive reception of information. Learners become co-creators of knowledge through collaborative and experiential activities that encourage communication and personal involvement. Creative expression also provides opportunities for emotional release and confidence building, particularly among students who may feel anxious or insecure in traditional classroom settings.

In language education, creative expression allows learners to practice communication in more natural and less threatening contexts. Through drama, storytelling, music, and role-play, students interact with language meaningfully while focusing less on fear of grammatical imperfection. Consequently, creative activities may reduce classroom tension and encourage spontaneous language use.

2.4 Emotional Scaffolding and Learning

The concept of scaffolding originates from sociocultural learning theory, particularly the work of Vygotsky (1978), who emphasized the importance of supportive interaction in cognitive development. Scaffolding refers to instructional support provided to learners as they acquire new skills and knowledge. Emotional scaffolding extends this concept by focusing on emotional encouragement, psychological safety, and supportive engagement during learning processes.

Rosiek (2003) explained that emotional scaffolding involves teaching practices that help learners manage emotional experiences while participating in academic tasks. Emotional scaffolding is especially important in learning situations that involve fear, vulnerability, or uncertainty, such as second language communication activities. Supportive classroom environments may therefore reduce anxiety and encourage learners to participate more confidently.

In second language acquisition, emotional scaffolding can occur through collaborative learning, encouragement, positive feedback, and creative participation. Arts-based activities provide emotional scaffolds by creating enjoyable and interactive learning experiences that shift learners' attention away from fear and toward meaningful communication. Learners become more willing to experiment with language when they feel emotionally supported and less afraid of making mistakes.

2.5 Creative Expression and Reduction of Affective Barriers

Recent studies suggest that creative expression can reduce affective barriers and improve learners' emotional engagement during second language acquisition. Arts-based pedagogies create interactive and supportive classroom environments that encourage communication, collaboration, and self-expression.

Drama-based instruction has been widely recognized as an effective strategy for reducing language anxiety. Maley and Duff (2005) noted that drama encourages spontaneity, confidence, emotional intelligence, and social interaction among learners. Through role-play and performance activities, students can communicate more naturally while temporarily distancing themselves from personal insecurities.

Music has also been associated with emotional relaxation and improved language retention. Medina (2002) observed that music enhances learners' motivation, attention, and memory during language learning activities. Songs and rhythmic activities help learners practice pronunciation and vocabulary in enjoyable and less stressful ways.

Storytelling and poetry similarly encourage emotional engagement and communication practice. Through storytelling, learners' express ideas creatively and develop narrative competence without excessive fear of linguistic errors. Poetry recitation improves pronunciation, rhythm, and confidence in oral communication.

Gregersen and MacIntyre (2014) argued that emotionally supportive learning environments contribute significantly to learners' resilience, motivation, and communicative confidence. They emphasized that language teachers should not only reduce negative emotional experiences but also create positive and enjoyable learning opportunities for students.

Within the Nigerian context, emerging educational practices indicate growing interest in arts-based pedagogies. Some tertiary institutions have incorporated drama, music, storytelling, and collaborative creative projects into language instruction to improve learner participation and reduce classroom anxiety. However, empirical research specifically examining creative expression as an emotional scaffold in Nigerian tertiary institutions remains limited.

2.6 Empirical Review

Several empirical studies have examined the relationship between creative pedagogies and second language learning outcomes. Adebayo (2021) investigated drama-based instruction among French language learners in a Southwestern Nigerian university and found that students exposed to drama activities demonstrated improved oral communication skills and reduced classroom anxiety. The study concluded that drama encouraged active participation and enhanced learners' confidence.

Okafor and Ibrahim (2022) examined music-assisted language instruction among Arabic language students in Nigerian universities. Findings revealed that music-based activities improved learners' motivation, pronunciation practice, and willingness to communicate in the target language. Students also reported feeling more relaxed and emotionally engaged during lessons involving music.

Internationally, Galante and Thomson (2017) explored the impact of performing arts on second language learning among university students in Canada. Their findings showed that drama and performance-based activities reduced communication apprehension and increased learners' willingness to speak in the target language.

Similarly, Liu and Chu (2010) investigated digital storytelling in language education and found that creative multimedia activities enhanced learner motivation, confidence, and classroom participation. Students reported feeling less anxious because creative tasks allowed for self-expression and collaborative interaction.

Although these studies highlight the educational benefits of arts-based approaches, limited empirical attention has been given to creative expression specifically as an emotional scaffold for alleviating affective barriers in second language acquisition within Nigerian tertiary institutions. This study therefore seeks to fill this gap by examining how creative expression supports learners emotionally and contributes to more effective second language acquisition experiences.

2.7 Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis and Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory. Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis explains that emotional variables such as anxiety, self-confidence, and motivation influence learners' ability to acquire language effectively. According to the theory, learners with low anxiety and high confidence are more likely to internalize language

input successfully. Creative expression may therefore reduce learners' affective filters by creating enjoyable and emotionally supportive learning environments.

Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory emphasizes the role of social interaction and collaborative learning in cognitive development. The theory suggests that learners acquire knowledge more effectively through supportive interactions within meaningful social contexts. Arts-based activities such as drama, storytelling, and collaborative creative projects provide opportunities for interaction, communication, and emotional support, thereby facilitating second language acquisition.

The integration of these theories provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how creative expression can function as an emotional scaffold for alleviating affective barriers in second language acquisition.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study adopted a mixed-methods research approach using a descriptive survey design. The mixed-methods approach combined quantitative and qualitative methods in order to obtain comprehensive data on the role of creative expression as an emotional scaffold in alleviating affective barriers in second language acquisition. The descriptive survey design was considered appropriate because it enabled the researcher to gather data from students regarding their emotional experiences, participation in creative activities, and perceptions of arts-based instructional strategies in second language learning.

3.2 Population of the Study

The population of the study comprised undergraduate students enrolled in second language courses in selected Nigerian tertiary institutions. The institutions selected for the study were:

- University of Lagos, Lagos State.
- University of Ibadan, Oyo State.
- Federal College of Education, Abeokuta, Ogun State.

The target population included students studying French, Arabic, English language education, and other language-related courses where second language acquisition formed part of the academic curriculum.

3.3 Sample and Sampling Technique

A total sample of 240 undergraduate students was selected for the study. The sample consisted of students drawn from the three selected institutions as follows:

- University of Lagos – 80 students
- University of Ibadan – 80 students
- Federal College of Education, Abeokuta – 80 students.

The study employed purposive and stratified sampling techniques. Purposive sampling was used to select institutions with active language programmes and evidence of creative or interactive instructional practices. Stratified sampling was then used to ensure adequate representation of students across different language disciplines and academic levels.

3.4 Instrument for Data Collection

Data were collected using two research instruments:

- Arts-Based Emotional Scaffolding Questionnaire (ABESQ)
- Semi-Structured Interview Guide

The questionnaire was divided into five sections:

Section A: Demographic information of respondents.

Section B: Nature of affective barriers experienced in second language learning.

Section C: Forms of creative expression used in language classrooms.

Section D: Influence of creative expression on anxiety reduction and learner confidence.

Section E: Challenges affecting the integration of creative expression in second language acquisition

The questionnaire items were structured using a four-point Likert scale of: Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), Strongly Disagree (SD)

The semi-structured interview guide was designed to obtain deeper insights into students' emotional experiences and perceptions of arts-based learning activities in second language classrooms.

3.5 Validity of the Instrument

The instruments were subjected to face and content validity by experts in language education, educational psychology, and arts education from Nigerian tertiary institutions. Their observations and recommendations were used to improve the clarity, relevance, and adequacy of the research instruments before final administration.

3.6 Reliability of the Instrument

A pilot study was conducted using 30 students from a tertiary institution outside the selected sample institutions. Data obtained from the pilot test were analyzed using Cronbach's Alpha reliability method. The reliability coefficient obtained for the questionnaire was 0.84, indicating that the instrument possessed high internal consistency and was suitable for the study.

3.7 Procedure for Data Collection

The researcher visited the selected institutions and obtained permission from relevant departmental authorities before administering the instruments. Copies of the questionnaire were distributed directly to respondents with the assistance of course lecturers and research assistants. The purpose of the study was clearly explained to participants, and confidentiality of responses was assured.

The interviews were conducted with selected students who voluntarily agreed to participate. Responses from the interviews were recorded and transcribed for analysis.

3.8 Method of Data Analysis

Quantitative data obtained from the questionnaire were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics such as frequency counts, percentages, mean scores, and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions.

The hypotheses formulated for the study were tested using Pearson Product Moment Correlation and t-test statistical analyses at 0.05 level of significance.

Qualitative data obtained from interviews were analyzed thematically. Responses were organized into themes relating to emotional experiences, learner participation, confidence, anxiety reduction, and perceptions of creative expression in second language acquisition.

3.9 Ethical Considerations

Ethical principles were strictly observed throughout the study. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were informed about the objectives of the research before data collection. Participants' identities and responses were treated confidentially and used strictly for academic purposes. Respondents were also assured that they could withdraw from the study at any stage without any negative consequences.

4. Data Presentation and Analysis

This section presents the analysis of data collected from respondents on creative expression as an emotional scaffold for alleviating affective barriers in second language acquisition in tertiary institutions. A total of 240 questionnaires were administered to students across the University of Lagos, University of Ibadan, and Federal College of Education, Abeokuta. Out of these, 228 copies were properly completed and returned, representing a response rate of 95%.

The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics such as frequency counts, percentages, mean scores, and standard deviation. The hypotheses were tested using Pearson Product Moment Correlation and t-test statistics at 0.05 level of significance.

4.1 Demographic Information of Respondents

Table 1: Distribution of Respondents by Institution

Institution	Frequency	Percentage (%)
University of Lagos	76	33.3
University of Ibadan	74	32.5
Federal College of Education, Abeokuta	78	34.2
Total	228	100

The table shows that 33.3% of the respondents were from the University of Lagos, 32.5% were from the University of Ibadan, while 34.2% were from the Federal College of Education, Abeokuta. This indicates balanced representation across the selected institutions.

Research Question One: What are the nature and extent of affective barriers experienced by students during second language acquisition in tertiary institutions?

Table 2: Affective Barriers Experienced by Students

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	Mean
1	I feel nervous when speaking a second language in class	102	86	24	16	3.20
2	I fear making mistakes during oral communication activities	118	74	20	16	3.29
3	I feel anxious when asked to respond publicly in a second language	95	89	28	16	3.15
4	Fear of negative evaluation affects my participation in language class	107	82	23	16	3.23
5	I avoid participating in classroom discussions because of anxiety	84	91	33	20	3.05

Grand Mean = 3.18

The findings reveal that students experience considerable affective barriers during second language acquisition. The grand mean score of 3.18 indicates that anxiety, fear of mistakes, communication apprehension, and fear of negative evaluation significantly affect learners' participation and confidence in language classrooms.

Research Question Two: What forms of creative expression are commonly used in second language learning?

Table 3: Forms of Creative Expression Used in Language Classrooms

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	Mean
1	Drama and role-play activities are used during language lessons	110	82	20	16	3.25
2	Music and songs are incorporated into language learning activities	98	88	25	17	3.17
3	Storytelling activities are used to encourage communication	104	86	22	16	3.22
4	Poetry recitation is used to improve pronunciation and fluency	90	92	28	18	3.11
5	Digital creative presentations are used in language classes	81	84	41	22	2.98

Grand Mean = 3.15

The findings indicate that drama, role-play, storytelling, music, poetry, and digital creative presentations are commonly used forms of creative expression in second language classrooms. Drama and storytelling emerged as the most frequently utilized creative strategies among respondents.

Research Question Three: How does creative expression influence anxiety reduction and communication confidence among second language learners?

Table 4: Influence of Creative Expression on Anxiety Reduction

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	Mean
1	Creative activities make me feel more relaxed during language lessons	115	80	20	13	3.30
2	Arts-based activities improve my confidence in speaking a second language	121	76	18	13	3.34
3	Drama and role-play reduce my fear of making mistakes	112	82	20	14	3.28
4	Creative expression encourages me to participate actively in class	117	79	19	13	3.31
5	Collaborative creative activities reduce classroom tension	109	84	22	13	3.21

Grand Mean = 3.29

The findings reveal that creative expression significantly contributes to reducing anxiety and improving communicative confidence among second language learners. Respondents agreed that arts-based activities create emotionally supportive learning environments that encourage participation and reduce fear.

Research Question Four: What are students’ perceptions of arts-based instructional strategies in second language acquisition?

Table 5: Students’ Perceptions of Arts-Based Strategies

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	Mean
1	Arts-based activities make language learning enjoyable	126	72	18	12	3.37
2	Creative expression improves my motivation to learn languages	118	81	17	12	3.33
3	I prefer interactive creative activities to conventional teaching methods	120	78	19	11	3.35
4	Creative expression improves learner collaboration and interaction	114	82	19	13	3.30
5	Arts-based learning should be integrated into language curricula	128	70	18	12	3.38

Grand Mean = 3.35

The results indicate that students hold positive perceptions toward arts-based instructional strategies. Respondents agreed that creative expression enhances enjoyment, motivation, collaboration, and participation during second language acquisition.

Research Question Five: What challenges affect the integration of creative expression into second language teaching and learning?

Table 6: Challenges Affecting Integration of Creative Expression

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	Mean
1	There are inadequate instructional resources for arts-based learning	109	83	22	14	3.26
2	Many lecturers lack training in creative instructional methods	115	78	21	14	3.29
3	Time constraints affect the use of creative activities in language classes	104	86	24	14	3.23
4	Some institutions prioritize conventional teaching approaches	111	80	23	14	3.26
5	Large class sizes limit effective creative participation	118	76	20	14	3.31

Grand Mean = 3.27

The findings show that inadequate instructional resources, insufficient lecturer training, time constraints, conventional pedagogical preferences, and large class sizes constitute major challenges affecting the integration of creative expression into second language teaching.

4.2 Test of Hypotheses

Hypothesis One

H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between creative expression and the reduction of affective barriers among second language learners in tertiary institutions.

Table 7: Pearson Correlation Analysis

Variables	N	r	p-value	Decision
Creative Expression and Reduction of Affective Barriers	228	0.72	0.000	Rejected

Since the p-value of 0.000 is less than the 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis was rejected. This indicates that there is a significant relationship between creative expression and the reduction of affective barriers among second language learners.

Hypothesis Two

H₀₂: Creative expression does not significantly influence students’ confidence and participation in second language classrooms.

Table 8: t-test Analysis of Creative Expression and Learner Confidence

Variables	N	Mean	SD	t	p-value	Decision
Students exposed to arts-based strategies	114	3.41	0.62	5.84	0.000	Rejected

Variables	N	Mean	SD	t	p-value	Decision
Students exposed to conventional methods	114	2.76	0.71			

Since the p-value of 0.000 is less than 0.05, the null hypothesis was rejected. This indicates that creative expression significantly influences students' confidence and participation in second language classrooms.

Hypothesis Three

H₀₃: There is no significant difference in the anxiety levels of students exposed to arts-based instructional strategies and those taught through conventional teaching methods in second language acquisition.

Table 9: t-test Analysis of Anxiety Levels

Variables	N	Mean	SD	t	p-value	Decision
Students exposed to arts-based strategies	114	2.31	0.58	6.17	0.000	Rejected
Students exposed to conventional methods	114	3.12	0.67			

Since the p-value of 0.000 is less than the 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis was rejected. This indicates that students exposed to arts-based instructional strategies experienced significantly lower anxiety levels than students taught through conventional teaching methods.

5. Discussion of Findings

The study revealed that affective barriers remain a major challenge in second language acquisition among students in selected Nigerian tertiary institutions. Respondents reported experiencing nervousness, fear of making mistakes, communication apprehension, and fear of negative evaluation during language learning activities, particularly in oral communication exercises. These emotional difficulties negatively influenced learners' willingness to participate actively in classroom interaction and spontaneous communication tasks. The prevalence of anxiety observed among the respondents suggests that emotional factors continue to hinder effective language acquisition in tertiary institutions.

This outcome supports the position of Horwitz et al. (1986), who identified foreign language anxiety as a significant psychological factor affecting learners' communicative competence and classroom participation. The result also agrees with MacIntyre and Gardner (1994), who explained that anxiety interferes with cognitive processing and affects learners' ability to retain and produce language effectively. Krashen's (1982) Affective Filter Hypothesis further explains that learners with heightened anxiety and low confidence often struggle to internalize language input successfully. The present study therefore reinforces existing scholarship emphasizing the critical role of emotional conditions in second language acquisition.

Another important outcome of the study was the identification of various forms of creative

expression used in second language classrooms. Drama, storytelling, music, poetry recitation, role-play, and digital creative presentations were commonly utilized instructional strategies among the sampled institutions. Drama and storytelling emerged as the most frequently used activities because they encouraged active participation and spontaneous communication among learners.

This finding corresponds with Eisner's (2002) argument that artistic experiences encourage imagination, interpretation, participation, and flexible thinking within educational environments. It also aligns with Greene's (1995) assertion that creative engagement enhances learners' emotional involvement and meaningful participation in learning processes. Maley and Duff (2005) similarly emphasized that drama-based activities promote confidence, spontaneity, and social interaction among language learners. The increasing use of creative instructional activities observed in the selected institutions indicates a gradual shift toward learner-centered pedagogical practices within Nigerian tertiary education.

The study further demonstrated that creative expression contributes significantly to reducing anxiety and improving communication confidence among second language learners. Respondents indicated that arts-based activities made language learning more relaxed, enjoyable, and interactive. Students also reported feeling more confident during communication tasks when involved in drama, music, storytelling, and collaborative creative activities. These activities reduced fear of criticism and encouraged freer participation during classroom interaction.

This result agrees with Gregersen and MacIntyre (2014), who argued that emotionally supportive and engaging learning environments help learners develop resilience, confidence, and communicative competence. It also supports Medina's (2002) position that music and creative engagement

improve learners' motivation, emotional involvement, and attention during language learning. Similarly, Adebayo (2021) observed that drama-based instruction reduced classroom anxiety and enhanced oral communication among French language learners in Southwestern Nigeria. In the same vein, Okafor and Ibrahim (2022) reported that music-assisted language instruction improved learner motivation and reduced communication apprehension among Arabic language students in Nigerian universities.

While previous studies largely examined individual creative strategies separately, the present study approached creative expression more broadly as an emotional scaffold encompassing multiple artistic and participatory activities. This broader perspective provides additional insight into how different forms of creative engagement collectively contribute to reducing affective barriers in second language acquisition.

Students' perceptions toward arts-based instructional strategies were generally positive. Respondents expressed preference for interactive and creative classroom activities over conventional teacher-centered instructional methods. Many students believed that creative expression enhanced motivation, collaboration, participation, enjoyment, and confidence during language learning. The positive attitudes expressed by learners suggest that arts-based pedagogies create emotionally safe and supportive environments that encourage meaningful communication.

This outcome supports Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural perspective, which emphasizes the importance of supportive interaction and collaborative learning in cognitive development. It also corresponds with Rosiek's (2003) concept of emotional scaffolding, which explains that emotionally supportive teaching practices encourage learners to engage confidently in academic activities. Mercer and Dörnyei (2020) similarly emphasized that positive emotional experiences within classrooms contribute significantly to learner motivation and well-being. The present study therefore demonstrates that emotionally supportive and creative learning environments can improve learners' attitudes toward second language acquisition.

Despite the positive contributions of creative expression, several challenges affecting its integration into second language teaching were identified. Respondents highlighted inadequate instructional resources, insufficient lecturer training, time constraints, large class sizes, and institutional preference for conventional teaching methods as major obstacles to the implementation of arts-based pedagogies. These challenges indicate that although

creative instructional approaches possess substantial educational value, institutional and structural limitations continue to hinder their effective application in tertiary institutions.

This observation aligns with Orafi and Borg (2009), who noted that innovative language teaching practices are frequently constrained by institutional policies, rigid curriculum structures, and inadequate resources. Nunan (2003) also observed that large class sizes and examination-oriented educational systems often limit opportunities for interactive and learner-centered instruction. The present study confirms that similar constraints continue to affect second language pedagogy within Nigerian tertiary institutions.

The hypotheses tested also provided important insights into the relationship between creative expression and second language acquisition. The rejection of the first hypothesis established a significant relationship between creative expression and the reduction of affective barriers among second language learners. This outcome suggests that arts-based activities play an important role in lowering anxiety, reducing fear, and improving learners' emotional comfort during language learning activities. Such a result further validates Krashen's (1982) position that emotionally supportive learning environments facilitate language acquisition by lowering learners' affective filters.

The second hypothesis revealed that creative expression significantly influences students' confidence and participation in second language classrooms. Students exposed to arts-based instructional strategies demonstrated higher levels of communicative confidence and classroom participation than those taught through conventional methods. This result supports Maley and Duff's (2005) view that creative activities enhance spontaneity, self-expression, and social interaction among learners.

Similarly, the rejection of the third hypothesis showed that students exposed to arts-based instructional strategies experienced lower anxiety levels than those taught through traditional teaching approaches. This outcome corresponds with studies conducted by Gregersen and MacIntyre (2014), Galante and Thomson (2017), and Adebayo (2021), all of which reported that creative and performance-based pedagogies contribute significantly to reducing language anxiety and improving learner participation.

Overall, the study establishes that creative expression functions effectively as an emotional scaffold capable of alleviating affective barriers in second language acquisition. Arts-based pedagogies provide emotionally supportive learning

environments that encourage confidence, collaboration, participation, and meaningful communication among learners. The study therefore reinforces the importance of integrating creative and emotionally responsive teaching strategies into second language instruction within tertiary institutions.

6. Conclusion

This study examined creative expression as an emotional scaffold for alleviating affective barriers in second language acquisition among students in selected Nigerian tertiary institutions. It established that emotional factors such as anxiety, fear of negative evaluation, communication apprehension, and low self-confidence significantly affect learners' participation and performance in second language classrooms. The findings revealed that many students experience emotional tension during oral communication activities, thereby limiting their willingness to interact freely in the target language.

The study further demonstrated that creative expression through drama, storytelling, music, poetry, role-play, and digital creative activities contributes significantly to reducing learners' anxiety and improving communication confidence. Arts-based instructional strategies were found to create emotionally supportive and interactive learning environments that encourage participation, collaboration, self-expression, and learner engagement. Students exposed to creative pedagogical practices reported increased motivation, improved confidence, enhanced classroom interaction, and greater willingness to communicate in second language learning contexts. The findings also revealed that learners possess positive perceptions toward arts-based instructional approaches and prefer interactive creative activities to conventional teacher-centered teaching methods. However, despite the educational potential of creative expression, several challenges hinder its effective integration into second language pedagogy in Nigerian tertiary institutions. These challenges include inadequate instructional resources, insufficient lecturer training, large class sizes, rigid curriculum structures, and institutional preference for traditional instructional approaches.

Overall, the study concludes that creative expression functions effectively as an emotional scaffold capable of alleviating affective barriers in second language acquisition. By reducing anxiety and promoting emotionally supportive learning experiences, arts-based pedagogies contribute positively to learners' communicative competence, confidence, and active participation in language classrooms. The study therefore highlights the importance of integrating creative and emotionally

responsive instructional approaches into second language teaching and learning in tertiary institutions.

7. Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

- Language educators in tertiary institutions should integrate arts-based instructional strategies such as drama, storytelling, music, poetry, role-play, and digital creative activities into second language teaching in order to reduce learners' anxiety and enhance classroom participation.
- Tertiary institutions should organize regular workshops, seminars, and professional development programmes to train language lecturers on the effective use of creative and emotionally responsive pedagogical approaches in second language acquisition.
- Curriculum developers should incorporate creative expression and arts-based learning activities into second language curricula to promote learner-centered and interactive teaching practices.
- Educational administrators should provide adequate instructional resources, creative learning spaces, and technological facilities that support arts-integrated language teaching and learning.
- Language lecturers should create emotionally supportive classroom environments where mistakes are viewed as part of the learning process rather than grounds for criticism or embarrassment.
- Institutional policies should encourage interdisciplinary collaboration between departments of languages, arts education, theatre arts, music, and educational technology in order to strengthen creative pedagogical practices.
- Further empirical studies should be conducted in other educational contexts and geographical regions to examine the long-term effects of creative expression on language proficiency, emotional well-being, and communicative competence among learners.

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