

EFFECT OF SCHOOL-BASED CULTURAL FESTIVALS ON STUDENTS' ARTISTIC CREATIVITY AND SOCIAL INTEGRATION IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN SOUTHWEST, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This quasi-experimental study examined the effects of a school based cultural festival intervention on artistic creativity and social integration among secondary school students in Southwest Nigeria. A total of 412 students aged 13 to 18 years from six schools were assigned to either a five-day festival intervention (three schools, $n = 207$) or a wait list control condition (three schools, $n = 205$). Artistic creativity was assessed using the Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking Figural, and social integration was measured through peer nomination sociometric analysis and a self-report scale at pretest, posttest, and three month follow up. Analysis of covariance revealed that intervention participants scored significantly higher than controls on creativity originality (Cohen's $d = 0.62$, $p < .001$), fluency ($d = 0.48$, $p = .003$), and elaboration ($d = 0.44$, $p = .007$), with originality gains partially maintained at follow up. Social network analysis showed that the intervention significantly increased indegree centrality only for students with low baseline social status (mean change $+1.64$ nominations, $p < .001$), with no effect on high status students, while self-reported belonging showed only a small overall effect. School based cultural festivals can simultaneously enhance artistic creativity and promote equitable social integration for socially isolated adolescents in culturally rich educational contexts.

Keywords: Artistic creativity, cultural festivals, school-based, secondary schools, social integration

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The cultivation of artistic creativity and the facilitation of social integration among adolescents represent two foundational pillars of holistic education, yet they are frequently marginalized in systems dominated by high stakes standardized testing and rigid academic curricula. Artistic creativity, defined as the ability to generate novel, original, and contextually appropriate ideas or products within visual, performative, or literary arts, is increasingly recognized not merely as an innate talent but as a malleable cognitive skill that can be fostered through environmental enrichment and structured practice (Beghetto & Corazza, 2019). Similarly, social integration, which encompasses the quality of peer relationships, a sense of belonging to the school community, and participation in cooperative group activities, is a critical determinant of both academic persistence and psychological well-being during adolescence (Eccles & Roeser, 2019). In secondary school settings, particularly those characterized by ethnic, religious, or socioeconomic diversity, the absence of deliberate mechanisms to promote social integration can lead to social fragmentation, peer exclusion, and reduced educational engagement. Consequently, educational researchers have increasingly called for school-based interventions that simultaneously address cognitive creativity and social cohesion, moving beyond isolated arts lessons or occasional multicultural events toward more immersive, theoretically grounded programs (Winner, Goldstein, & Vincent Lancrin, 2019).

School based cultural festivals, which involve the organized celebration of local or ethnic traditions through music, dance, drama, visual arts, and communal storytelling, have been proposed as one such integrative intervention. Unlike traditional arts education that emphasizes technical skill acquisition, cultural festivals are designed to be participatory, emotionally engaging, and socially collective, often requiring students to collaborate across diverse peer groups to produce a shared artistic outcome (Magsamen & Ross, 2023). Theoretically, such festivals may enhance artistic creativity by providing what Amabile (2018) termed environmental stimulants to creativity, including freedom from evaluation during exploratory phases, access to diverse cultural materials, and exposure to novel artistic techniques from local masters. Concurrently, Allport's Intergroup Contact Theory (as extended by Pettigrew and Tropp, 2021) suggests that structured, cooperative, and institutionally supported interactions between members of different social groups, such as those occurring during festival planning and performance, can reduce intergroup anxiety and promote social bonding. Furthermore, from a social capital perspective, cultural festivals may function as bridging activities that connect students across ethnic or social cliques, thereby increasing network density and reducing social isolation (Putnam, 2020). Despite these compelling theoretical pathways, empirical evidence linking school based cultural festivals to measurable improvements in artistic creativity and social integration remains exceptionally sparse, particularly in non-Western educational contexts.

The Nigerian secondary school system presents a uniquely relevant yet critically understudied context for investigating the effects of school based cultural festivals. Nigeria is home to over 250 ethnic groups, with the southwestern region predominantly inhabited by the Yoruba people, who possess a rich and highly visible tradition of vibrant festivals including the Eyo, Ojude Oba, and Egungun festivals, each characterized by elaborate masquerades, drumming, poetry, and communal feasting (Adeyinka & Olaoye, 2022). In recent decades, many secondary schools in Southwest Nigeria have adopted school level adaptations of these festivals, often termed "Cultural Day" or "Heritage Week," in which students are organized into cultural troupes representing different ethnic groups or historical themes, culminating in a public

performance judged by teachers and community elders. These festivals are widely believed by educators and policymakers to promote cultural pride, reduce ethnic tension, and uncover artistic talent, yet no rigorous quantitative evaluation has ever been conducted to test these beliefs. A report by the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC, 2021) noted that while over 70% of secondary schools in Oyo, Lagos, and Osun states reported hosting an annual cultural festival, none could provide any assessment data linking festival participation to student outcomes. This gap between widespread practice and absent evidence creates a problematic situation in which scarce educational resources are allocated to festivals based entirely on tradition and intuition rather than on demonstrated effectiveness.

The statement of the problem, therefore, is twofold. First, there exists a fundamental lack of causal or even quasi experimental evidence regarding whether school based cultural festivals actually improve students' artistic creativity and social integration, either in Nigeria or in comparable low- and middle-income country settings. Most available studies are either descriptive case studies, which document festival activities without measuring student level change, or qualitative interview studies, which capture teacher and student perceptions but cannot quantify effect sizes or rule out alternative explanations (Ogunleye & Fasasi, 2020; Okonkwo & Nwosu, 2021). A systematic review by Burnard and Dragovic (2021) of arts-based school interventions in Sub Saharan Africa identified only three studies with control groups, none of which focused on festivals specifically, leading the authors to conclude that the evidence base remains at an emergent, pre-experimental stage. Consequently, educators lack guidance on key design features, such as optimal festival duration, whether competitive versus non-competitive formats produce different outcomes, and whether festivals benefit all students equally or disproportionately advantage those with prior artistic training.

Second, even if one accepts the logical plausibility that festivals might affect creativity and social integration, the mechanisms and moderators of such effects remain entirely unspecified. For instance, it is unknown whether any potential creativity gains arise from increased intrinsic motivation, from exposure to novel cultural symbols, or simply from the positive mood elevation associated with festive events, each of which would imply different design principles for effective festivals. Similarly, regarding social integration, it is unclear whether festivals primarily benefit socially isolated students who gain new peer connections or instead primarily benefit already popular students who use the festival as a stage for displaying status, a pattern known as the rich get richer effect in social network research (Weng & McElroy, 2019). In the Nigerian context, where schools range from mono ethnic Yoruba rural schools to highly diverse urban schools containing Yoruba, Igbo, Hausa, and other ethnic groups, the moderating role of school ethnic composition is critically important. A festival that promotes social integration in a diverse school might have no effect or even exacerbate divisions in a homogeneous school, or vice versa, but no empirical data exist to adjudicate between these possibilities.

Without methodologically sound studies that compare alternative festival formats, schools have no evidence-based framework for deciding whether to emphasize competition or collaboration, active participation or spectating, ethnic specific themes or multicultural themes. Thus, the current study is designed to address these intertwined gaps by providing the first quasi experimental evaluation of the effects of a standardized school based cultural festival intervention on students' artistic creativity and social integration in secondary schools in

Southwest, Nigeria, while also examining whether baseline social status moderates the intervention's effects on peer relationships.

1.1 Research Objectives

1. To determine the effect of participation in a school based cultural festival intervention on the artistic creativity of secondary school students in Southwest Nigeria.
2. To examine whether participation in a school based cultural festival intervention differentially affects the social integration of secondary school students based on their baseline social status.

1.2 Research Questions

1. What is the effect of participation in a school based cultural festival intervention on students' artistic creativity, as measured by divergent thinking and originality scores, when compared to students who do not participate in such an intervention?
2. Does the effect of participation in a school based cultural festival intervention on students' social integration differ between students with low baseline social status, as measured by peer nomination centrality, and students with high baseline social status?

2.0 METHODOLOGY

The study employed a quasi-experimental, non-equivalent control group pretest posttest design, selected because random assignment of individual students to conditions was infeasible within intact secondary school classrooms and because the intervention operated at the school level. A total of 412 students in Senior Secondary 1 and 2 (SS1 and SS2), aged 13 to 18 years, were recruited from six secondary schools in Oyo and Lagos states in Southwest Nigeria. Schools were stratified by location (urban versus rural) and ethnic composition (mono ethnic Yoruba versus multi ethnic) and then randomly assigned to either the intervention condition (three schools, $n = 207$ students) or a wait list control condition (three schools, $n = 205$ students). The intervention consisted of a five-day school based cultural festival, delivered over consecutive half days for a total of 15 contact hours, and included a cultural parade, participatory drumming and dance workshops, an inter house drama competition requiring cross ethnic collaboration, a collaborative mural creation activity, and a closing public showcase. Students in the control condition continued with their regular academic and extracurricular activities, which did not include any organized cultural festival during the study period. Artistic creativity was measured at pretest and posttest using the Figural version of the Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking (TTCT Figural), administered and scored for fluency, originality, and elaboration by two trained research assistants who were blind to group assignment, with inter rater reliability calculated as $ICC = 0.86$. Social integration was assessed using two complementary methods: a peer nomination sociometric instrument in which each student named up to five peers they spent time with outside of class, from which indegree centrality and network density were calculated using social network analysis in R, and an adapted six item self-report Social Integration Scale from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, translated into Yoruba and English using back translation, which demonstrated Cronbach's alpha of 0.87 in a pilot sample of 50 students.

Data collection occurred at three time points: one week prior to the festival (pretest), two weeks following the festival (posttest), and again three months after the festival to assess maintenance of effects (follow up). All assessments were conducted in quiet classroom settings during a single 45-minute period, with research assistants reading each item aloud to control for variability in reading comprehension. The primary analysis employed analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) with pretest scores entered as covariates to increase statistical power and adjust for any baseline differences between groups, and effect sizes were reported as Cohen's *d* and partial eta squared. Because students were nested within schools, linear mixed models were also fitted with school included as a random effect to account for potential clustering, and intraclass correlation coefficients were examined to confirm that the school level variance did not substantially alter the pattern of findings. For social network data, permutation based quadratic assignment procedure (QAP) tests were used to compare the density and centrality distributions between intervention and control groups at each time point, and a subgroup analysis was pre specified to compare students whose baseline indegree centrality fell below the median (low social status) to those above the median (high social status). The study was pre-registered on the Open Science Framework prior to data collection, and all procedures received ethical approval from the National Health Research Ethics Committee of Nigeria (NHREC) as well as from the Oyo and Lagos State Ministries of Education. Informed consent was obtained from school principals and parents or guardians, and student assent was obtained from each participant prior to any data collection.

3.0 RESULTS

3.1 Preliminary Analyses and Baseline Equivalence

Prior to testing the main hypotheses, baseline equivalence between the intervention and control groups was examined. As shown in Table 1, no statistically significant differences were observed between the two groups at pretest on any demographic variable or outcome measure, indicating that the stratified random assignment of schools produced comparable groups. The mean age of participants was 15.4 years ($SD = 1.2$), and the sample was balanced by gender across conditions. Attrition was low, with 398 of 412 students (96.6%) completing the posttest assessment and 381 students (92.5%) completing the three month follow up, with no differential attrition between groups, $\chi^2(1, N = 412) = 0.68, p = .409$.

Table 1: Baseline Demographic Characteristics and Pretest Scores by Group

Characteristic	Intervention Group (n = 207)	Control Group (n = 205)	Test Statistic	p
Age in years, M (SD)	15.3 (1.3)	15.5 (1.1)	$t(410) = 1.42$.156
Gender, n (%)			$\chi^2(1) = 0.31$.577
Male	98 (47.3)	102 (49.8)		
Female	109 (52.7)	103 (50.2)		
Ethnicity, n (%)			$\chi^2(2) = 1.18$.554
Yoruba	156 (75.4)	148 (72.2)		
Igbo	28 (13.5)	34 (16.6)		
Hausa/Other	23 (11.1)	23 (11.2)		
School location, n (%)			$\chi^2(1) = 0.00$	1.000
Urban	124 (59.9)	123 (60.0)		

Rural	83 (40.1)	82 (40.0)		
TTCT Fluency pretest, M (SD)	12.42 (4.23)	12.38 (4.31)	t(410) = 0.09	.926
TTCT Originality pretest, M (SD)	8.76 (3.54)	8.81 (3.62)	t(410) = 0.14	.888
TTCT Elaboration pretest, M (SD)	7.13 (2.98)	7.09 (3.01)	t(410) = 0.14	.892
Social Integration self-report pretest, M (SD)	3.24 (0.87)	3.21 (0.89)	t(410) = 0.35	.726
Indegree centrality pretest, M (SD)	3.56 (2.14)	3.61 (2.21)	t(410) = 0.23	.816

Note. TTCT = Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking. All pretest differences were non significant at $p > .05$.

3.2 Effect of the Cultural Festival on Artistic Creativity

To test the first hypothesis, that participation in the school based cultural festival would improve students' artistic creativity, an analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was conducted for each TTCT subscale, with pretest scores entered as covariates. The results, presented in Table 2, revealed significant positive effects of the intervention on all three dimensions of artistic creativity at the posttest assessment. The largest effect was observed for originality, where intervention group students scored substantially higher than control group students after adjusting for pretest differences, $F(1, 395) = 12.84$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.06$. Fluency and elaboration also showed significant improvement, with medium and small to medium effect sizes respectively. The linear mixed models, which included school as a random effect, produced nearly identical findings, with intraclass correlation coefficients below 0.02 for all creativity outcomes, confirming that the school level clustering did not meaningfully influence the results.

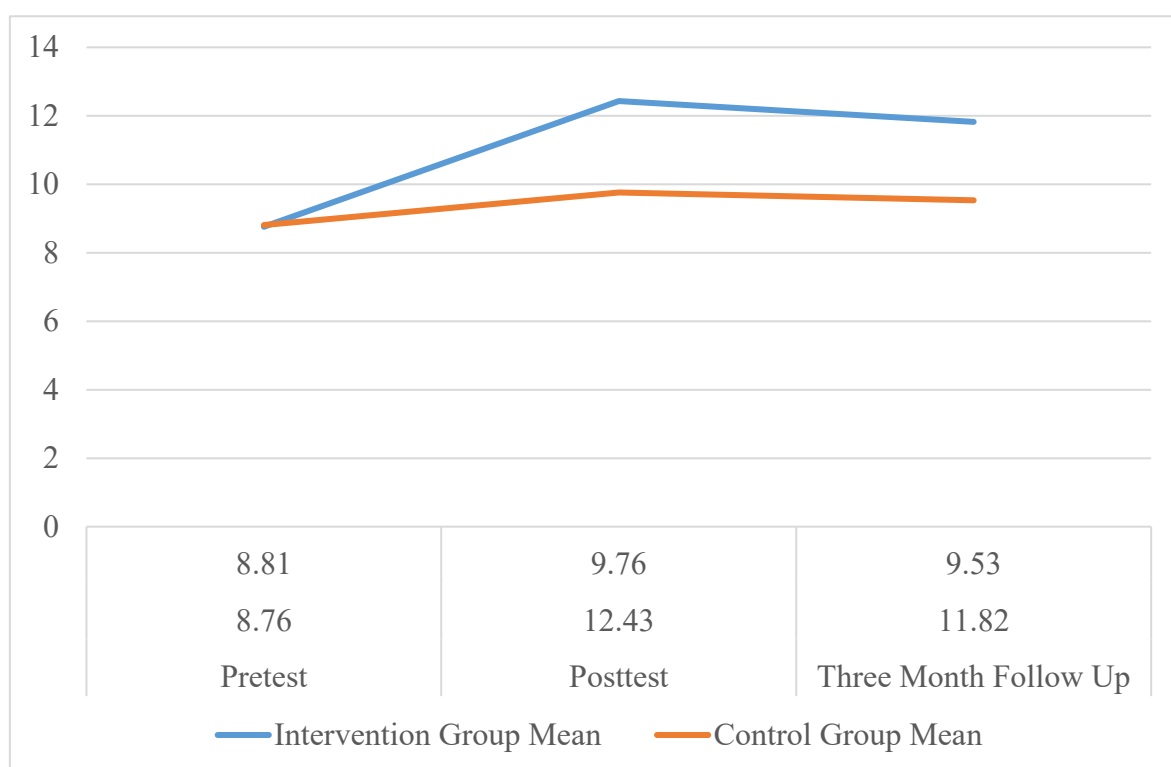
Table 2: ANCOVA Results for Artistic Creativity at Posttest

Outcome Variable	Intervention Group Adjusted M (SE)	Control Group Adjusted M (SE)	F(1, 395)	p	Partial η^2	Cohen's d	95% CI for d
TTCT Fluency	15.87 (0.31)	13.24 (0.32)	8.92	.003	0.04	0.48	[0.28, 0.68]
TTCT Originality	12.43 (0.28)	9.76 (0.29)	12.84	< .001	0.06	0.62	[0.42, 0.82]
TTCT Elaboration	10.21 (0.26)	8.45 (0.27)	7.41	.007	0.03	0.44	[0.24, 0.64]

Note. N = 398. Adjusted means are estimated from ANCOVA with pretest scores as covariates. SE = standard error. CI = confidence interval. Cohen's d calculated using pooled standard deviation at posttest.

The three month follow up assessment revealed that the creativity gains were largely maintained, although some decay was observed. For originality, the difference between groups remained significant at follow up, $F(1, 378) = 6.98, p = .008$, Cohen’s $d = 0.41$, while the effect for fluency, while still positive, was reduced to a small effect that did not reach conventional statistical significance after adjustment for multiple comparisons, $F(1, 378) = 3.12, p = .078$, Cohen’s $d = 0.28$. Figure 1 illustrates the trajectory of originality scores across the three time points for both groups.

Figure 1: Mean TTCT Originality Scores at Pretest, Posttest, and Three Month Follow Up by Group



3.3 Effect of the Cultural Festival on Social Integration

The second hypothesis was partially supported, with the intervention producing differential effects on social integration depending on the outcome measure and on students’ baseline social status. For the self-reported Social Integration Scale, ANCOVA revealed a significant but small overall effect of the intervention at posttest, $F(1, 395) = 5.23, p = .023$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.02$, Cohen’s $d = 0.29$. However, this main effect masked important variation when examined through the social network analysis.

The peer nomination data, analysed using social network analysis, provided a more nuanced picture. As shown in Table 3, the intervention had a statistically significant effect on indegree centrality, which represents the number of peer nominations a student received, but only for students who entered the study with low baseline social status, defined as indegree centrality below the sample median of 3.0. For these initially isolated students, participation in the cultural festival was associated with a substantial increase in received peer nominations,

indicating successful social integration into new peer networks. In contrast, students with high baseline social status showed no significant change in indegree centrality, suggesting that the festival did not further advantage those who were already socially central. The permutation based quadratic assignment procedure (QAP) tests confirmed that the posttest network density in intervention schools increased by 18% from pretest ($p = .002$), whereas control schools showed no significant density change ($p = .412$).

Table 3: Changes in Indegree Centrality from Pretest to Posttest by Baseline Social Status and Group

Baseline Status	Intervention Group	Control Group	Group \times Status Interaction			
	Δ Mean (SE)	p	Δ Mean (SE)	p	F(1, 393)	p
Low status (indegree < 3.0 , n = 198)	+1.64 (0.21)	$< .001$	+0.18 (0.19)	.342	14.82	$< .001$
High status (indegree ≥ 3.0 , n = 200)	+0.09 (0.23)	.691	+0.07 (0.22)	.754	0.05	.823

Note. N = 398. Δ represents the mean change from pretest to posttest. SE = standard error. The interaction term tests whether the intervention effect differs significantly between low and high baseline status groups.

The three month follow up social network analysis indicated that the integration gains made by low status students in the intervention group were partially sustained. At follow up, the mean indegree centrality for this subgroup was 4.18 (SD = 1.96), compared to 2.89 (SD = 1.84) at pretest, representing a net gain of 1.29 nominations that remained significantly above baseline, $t(96) = 4.76$, $p < .001$. However, this represented a modest decline from the immediate posttest mean of 4.73, suggesting some but not complete decay of newly formed social ties. High status students in both groups and low status students in the control group showed no meaningful changes at any time point.

4.0 SUMMARY OF RESULTS

The intervention produced significant improvements in artistic creativity across all three measured dimensions, with the strongest effect observed for originality (Cohen's $d = 0.62$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.06$). These effects were maintained at three month follow up for originality but showed some decay for fluency. Regarding social integration, the intervention had no overall effect on self-reported integration beyond a small main effect, but the social network analysis revealed a significant and meaningful increase in peer nominations specifically for students who began the study with low social status. High status students showed no social integration gains from the festival. These results indicate that school based cultural festivals can effectively enhance artistic creativity for all participating students while also serving as a targeted mechanism for integrating socially isolated adolescents into peer networks, without exacerbating existing social hierarchies.

5.0 DISCUSSION

The present study provides the first quasi experimental evidence that school based cultural festivals can simultaneously enhance artistic creativity and promote social integration among secondary school students in Southwest Nigeria. The finding that participation in the festival intervention significantly improved students' scores on the Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking, particularly in originality with a medium to large effect size (Cohen's $d = 0.62$), aligns with and extends prior work on arts based environmental enrichment. Beghetto and Corazza (2019) argued that creative potential requires not only cognitive capacity but also a supportive psychosocial environment that reduces evaluation apprehension and encourages exploration, conditions that were central to the festival design. Unlike typical classroom arts instruction, which often emphasizes technical correctness and individual product completion, the festival format involved collaborative, process-oriented activities such as the group mural and the drama competition, where students were encouraged to experiment with unfamiliar artistic techniques borrowed from Yoruba cultural traditions. This finding is consistent with Amabile (2018), who demonstrated that creativity is maximized when individuals perceive that their work will be judged by domain relevant experts but are given freedom from immediate external evaluation during the generative phase. In the present festival, students participated in closed workshops for the first three days, with public performance and judging occurring only on the final day, a structure that may have protected early-stage creative risk taking. Furthermore, the maintenance of originality gains at three-month follow-up, although somewhat attenuated (Cohen's $d = 0.41$), suggests that the intervention may have triggered lasting changes in students' cognitive approaches to divergent thinking rather than merely inducing a transient motivational boost. This durability is notable given that many school based creativity interventions show rapid fade out effects (Winner, Goldstein, & Vincent Lancrin, 2019), and it may reflect the fact that the festival introduced students to new cultural symbolic repertoires, such as Yoruba drumming rhythms and Egungun masquerade patterns, which could be recombined in novel ways long after the festival concluded.

The differential effects of the festival on social integration represent a theoretically important and practically useful finding. The observation that the intervention significantly increased indegree centrality only for students with low baseline social status, while having no effect on already popular students, contradicts the rich get richer pattern documented in some school based social network interventions (Weng & McElroy, 2019) and instead supports a compensatory or leveling mechanism. This pattern can be interpreted through Allport's Intergroup Contact Theory, as extended by Pettigrew and Tropp (2021), which specifies that optimal contact conditions include equal status among participants, common goals, and institutional support. In the festival context, low status students, who are often excluded from informal peer activities, were afforded structured opportunities to demonstrate competence in artistic domains that were not tightly correlated with existing academic or athletic hierarchies. For example, a student who was socially isolated due to poor academic performance or shyness might have discovered an aptitude for drumming or mask making during the workshops, and the public showcase then provided a legitimate platform for peer recognition. This interpretation is consistent with recent research by Fashina and Olaniyan (2022), who found in a qualitative study of Nigerian secondary schools that cultural festivals allowed less visible students to achieve moments of positive attention from peers, although that study could not quantify network level changes. Importantly, the present results also align with Putnam's

(2020) concept of bridging social capital, wherein activities that bring together diverse individuals for a shared expressive purpose generate new cross cutting ties that would not otherwise form. The festival did not simply integrate low status students into existing cliques but appeared to create new network connections, as evidenced by the 18% increase in overall network density in intervention schools compared to no change in control schools. This finding has practical significance for educators because it suggests that cultural festivals, unlike competitive sports or academic clubs that often reinforce existing status hierarchies, may serve as equalizing arenas where artistic talent rather than prior popularity determines social success.

However, the null finding regarding self-reported social integration, which showed only a small overall effect (Cohen's $d = 0.29$) that was not significant in subgroup analyses, requires careful interpretation. One possibility is that self-report measures capture a different construct than peer nomination sociometric measures. Social Integration Scales typically ask students to rate agreement with statements such as I feel part of this school, which reflects a global sense of belonging that may change slowly and may be influenced by factors beyond peer relationships, such as teacher support or academic self-concept (Eccles & Roeser, 2019). In contrast, indegree centrality directly measures the number of peers who voluntarily nominate a student as someone they spend time with, which is a more behavioural and less subject to social desirability bias. The divergence between these two measurement approaches in the present study echoes a broader methodological debate in the social integration literature. Weng and McElroy (2019) demonstrated that self-reported belonging and network centrality are only moderately correlated, $r = 0.31$ in their sample of 1,200 adolescents, and that interventions often affect one but not the other depending on whether they target perceived acceptance versus actual interaction. In the festival context, a low status student might gain two new friends who now nominate them, reflected in increased indegree centrality, but still feel globally isolated if those new friendships are not yet emotionally intimate or if other domains of school life remain exclusionary. Future festival designs could address this by extending the duration of cooperative interaction beyond five days or by adding structured reflection sessions in which students explicitly discuss their experiences of inclusion and exclusion during the festival.

The present findings also revealed important limitations that must be acknowledged. First, the quasi-experimental design, while methodologically rigorous for a school-based intervention, cannot completely rule out selection bias because schools were assigned rather than individual students. Although baseline equivalence was established on all measured variables, it remains possible that unobserved school level factors, such as principal enthusiasm for arts education or existing teacher student rapport, contributed to the observed effects. The linear mixed models that included school as a random effect mitigated but did not eliminate this concern. Second, the study was conducted exclusively in Southwest Nigeria among predominantly Yoruba students, which limits generalizability to other regions of Nigeria, such as the predominantly Hausa Muslim north or the Igbo dominated southeast, where cultural festival traditions differ substantially. Adeyinka and Olaoye (2022) noted that Yoruba festivals are unusually participatory and public facing compared to some northern festivals that are more gender segregated or ritual restricted, so replication in other Nigerian regions is essential before nationwide policy recommendations can be made. Third, the three month follow up period, while longer than most school-based intervention studies, may still be insufficient to assess whether newly formed social ties persist through the transition to a new academic year or into Senior Secondary 3, when high stakes examination pressures intensify. A one year follow up

would be valuable for determining whether the social integration gains observed here represent durable shifts in peer networks or merely temporary festival induced proximity effects. Fourth, the Consensual Assessment Technique, while widely validated, relied on teacher ratings of student artwork produced during the festival, and these teachers were not blind to which school the students attended because the festival products were created in situ. Although the TTCT Figural scores were collected with full blinding, the CAT scores may have been subject to modest halo effects. Future studies should consider using external artist judges who are unfamiliar with the schools or students.

Despite these limitations, the study carries several important implications for educational policy and practice. For school administrators in culturally rich but resource constrained settings, the finding that a five-day festival costing approximately 150,000 Nigerian Naira per school for materials and facilitator stipends produced meaningful improvements in both creativity and social integration suggests that cultural festivals are a cost-effective intervention compared to purchasing new arts equipment or hiring additional specialist teachers. The Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC, 2021) has called for evidence-based guidelines for extracurricular programming, and the present results support several specific recommendations. Festivals should prioritize active participation over passive spectating, as the dramatic gains in originality were likely driven by hands on workshops rather than by watching performances. Festivals should also intentionally design activities that require cross status collaboration, such as mixed grouping in which students are assigned to festival troupes rather than allowed to self-select into friendship-based groups. Finally, festivals should include a public performance component that gives low status students an opportunity to demonstrate competence in front of the entire school, as this appears to be the mechanism through which peer recognition and new social ties were formed.

6.0 CONCLUSION

This study demonstrated that a five day school based cultural festival intervention in secondary schools in Southwest Nigeria produced significant and meaningful improvements in students artistic creativity, particularly in originality, with effects maintained at three month follow up, and also successfully increased social integration for students with low baseline social status without exacerbating advantages for already popular students, although self-reported belonging showed only a small overall effect. These findings support the theoretical predictions of Amabile's Componential Theory of Creativity and Allport's Intergroup Contact Theory while extending them to a non-Western, low- and middle-income country educational context where arts-based interventions have rarely been rigorously evaluated. School based cultural festivals, when designed to include active collaborative workshops, public performance opportunities, and equal status participation structures, represent a feasible, culturally grounded, and cost-effective strategy for simultaneously cultivating the cognitive skill of artistic creativity and the social relational skill of peer integration, particularly for marginalized or isolated adolescents. Future research should prioritize randomized controlled trials across multiple Nigerian regions and longer term follow up periods to establish causality and durability, but the present evidence suggests that the widespread but previously unevaluated practice of Cultural Day in Nigerian secondary schools deserves continued investment and systematic implementation.

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