

Cultural Heritage, Identity Formation, And Creative Expression of Persons with Disabilities: A Qualitative Case Study

Olufemi Timothy Adigun¹, Faisat Adekilekun Tijani²

{olufemiadigun@yahoo.com ¹, mrstijanifa@gmail.com ²}

Open Distance Learning, College of Education, University of South Africa, Pretoria, South Africa ¹

The Oakwood Montessori School, Lagos, Nigeria ²

Abstract. There is limited research on how cultural heritage and identity formation influence the creative expression of persons with disabilities. Guided by Erik Erikson's theory of psychosocial development, this study used a case study approach to examine the implications of cultural heritage and identity formation on creative expression among persons with disabilities. Two research questions guided the study. Data were collected through semi-structured oral interviews with two purposively selected participants from Ibadan, Southwestern Nigeria. Using an interpretivist paradigm, the data were analysed through thematic content analysis. Three major themes emerged: cultural belief systems and superstition, cultural awakening, and self-awareness. Findings revealed that the participants experienced traumatic psychosocial challenges linked to societal and cultural perceptions of disability, but they coped with these experiences through creative expression. The study highlights the importance of increasing awareness and sensitisation programmes aimed at demystifying the causes of disabilities, particularly among conservative Yoruba communities where traditional beliefs and close-knit cultural practices remain influential.

Keywords: Cultural heritage, identity formation, creative arts, persons with disabilities, socio-cultural integration

1 Introduction

The implication and role of cultural influence is central to a crystal understanding of disability. In other words, disability can better be understood when carefully thought of through the lens of culture and how culture influences the identity formation of persons with disabilities [1], [2]. Disability is a phenomenon that can be found in every community, with no exception, among the *Yorùbá* people of Southwest Nigeria [1], [2], [3], [4]. The *Yorùbá* culture thrives on an oral

tradition¹ rooted in a mythological understanding of phenomena. For instance, in Yorùbá mythology, the origin of disability is strictly associated with various Yorùbá deities (gods), such as Òrìṣà-ńlá or Ọ̀bàtálá [5], [6], [7]. According to the *Yorùbá* oral tradition and existing literary evidence, disability is viewed as the resultant effect of punishment by the gods for ancestral or individual violation of cultural/societal norms, a curse, or a taboo [6], [7], [8], [9], [10].

The Yorùbá cultural belief systems not only attribute disability to punishments from deities, a curse, or a taboo, but also serve as a means of awakening to socio-cultural norms [1], [2], [3], [11], [12], [13]. In recent times, advocacies and enlightenments have positively shaped the understanding of disability and societal attitudes towards persons with disabilities, and these have also enhanced the creative expression and employability potentials of persons with disabilities. However, the cultural/societal construction of disability is still evident among the *Yorùbá people* in Nigeria [4], and this influences the creative expression and potential of persons with disabilities. While creative expression can be an antidote for an identity crisis [14], [15], the implication of cultural heritage and identity formation on creative expression is yet to be explored in existing research reports. This current study was thus advanced to bridge this research gap using the following research questions:

1. Are there any derivatives of cultural heritage that influence creative expression among the study participants? If yes, are they?
2. Are there any implications of identity formation that motivate creative expression among the study participants? If yes, what are they?

2 Literature review

Creative expression is a term used to describe the process of communicating one's emotions, ideas, and thoughts through various creative activities such as music, writing, and visual and performing arts. Creative expression may thus be said to be an observable display of creativity, which is motivated by an interplay of cognitive processes, socio-environmental experiences, and personal skills [66], [67]. Creative expression is the function of a combination of emotion and imagination and has therefore been found to foster communication and well-being and enhance problem-solving potential. Beghetto [16] posits that creative expression allows an individual to explore and understand themselves from their unique perspective, and to establish social connections with others through shared experiences and understanding. In addition, Kevers et al. [64] and Schubert [65] assert that creative expression can positively advance cognitive, emotional, and social functioning and vice versa.

In addition to creative ability, creative expression has been argued to be influenced by additional dynamic factors resident in cultural heritage [5], [10]. Beghetto [16] and Onwuatuegwu [10] contend that there is sparse research evidence on artistic expression based on cultural principles and values, but some available studies have identified and noted a significant influence of inherited cultural and traditional practices on creative expression [10], [17]. In their analysis on

¹ Oral tradition is a form of communication wherein art, concepts, culture, ideas, and knowledge are not only received but preserved and transmitted orally from one generation to another through ballads, chants, folktales, poetry, prose, or song.

how culture shapes creativity, Shao et al. [17] maintained that creativity and its expression are deeply rooted in all cultures, but their definition and attributes vary across cultures. There is an observable plethora of existing research, such as that by Al-Dilaimya et al. [18], Boyko [19], Crossman [20] and Lim et al. [21], that noted the role of superstition as a critical component of every culture. Superstition has been described as an irrational cultural belief that illogically influences a course of events and its associated outcome [20], [21]. Superstitious beliefs that are shaped by cultural behavioural habits and transmitted via oral traditions occupy a well-established niche in every society, but they differ across cultures [22], [23]. As per the position of Habibullayevna [23] and Vyse [22], *research evidence has proven that superstitious belief systems have shaped the psychosocial construction of disabilities and the expectations of persons with disabilities significantly within the Yorùbá social-cultural space* [5], [6], [9], [11], [24] [25], [26]. The foregoing studies posit that the cultural beliefs and ceremonies and the religious rituals and practices produce an illusion that maintains and controls the societal dynamics that influence the self-construction and self-image of persons with disabilities within the *Yorùbá society*.

Ludwig [27] contends that cultural heritage has a significant influence on the creativity and creative expression of members of society, regardless of their culturally based superstition. As further noted by Ludwig [27], the influence of culture on creative expression varies based on who is creative, how creative they are, what they do, and the function of the creative ability displayed. Despite the negative attitude towards persons with disabilities, Ludwig [27] contends that millions of persons with disabilities have rebelled against their traditions and broken the shackles that constrain them through expression of their creative ability, thereby creating a positive space around them (persons with disabilities) and their social environment. Recent literature provides evidence of the therapeutic nature of creative expression [28], [29]; however, Jones [30] has expressed concern about the lack of research evidence on creative expression among persons with disabilities. Based on the position of Sandahl [31] and Wendler and Schubert [32] on the order of relationships between environmental circumstances and how persons with disabilities navigate their complex socio-environmental dynamics, Jones [33] contends that creativity and disability are like *conjoined twins*, because the experience of a disabling condition fosters creative ability because of nuanced psychosocial experiences.

In his study on disability identity, Watermeyer [34] posits that there is an interwoven complexity between disability and identity formation based on established social-cultural and environmental experiences. Identity formation can be described as an intrapersonal phenomenon that shapes the understanding of self based on ‘who I am’, ‘how I fit into society’, and ‘how I relate to members of the larger society’. Interestingly, such personal processing of self-identity formation is motivated significantly by external factors such as ethnicity, gender, interests, and socio-cultural dynamics [35]. Several studies affirm that identity formation is an age-related process, but its achievement is not isolated from socio-cultural phenomena [36], [37]. Barbot and Heuser [38] acknowledge the fluidity in the relationship between identity formation and creativity or creative expression. In other words, while the formation of ones’ identity evolves based on intra- and social-environmental dynamics, creativity and the expression thereof evolves constantly. According to Barbot and Heuser [38], Lengelle et al. [39], and Sica et al. [40], the fluidity of the two constructs, identity formation and creativity, has led to significant difficulty in existing research to establish an assertive empirical association between the two concepts using a quantitative research approach. Hence, the paucity of research

attention on the link between identity formation and creativity [38], although a few studies have employed a qualitative research approach to provide an understanding of the implication of identity formation on creativity [41], [42], [43], [44]. Available research evidence indicates that identity is a complex phenomenon and a relationship between self-identity, creativity, and creative expression [45], [46], [47], [48], [49], [50].

In their studies, Dollinger and Dollinger [51] and Ziller [52] found and reported an inverse correlation between students' identity formation and creativity when examining autobiographic essays. On the other hand, Helson and Pals [53], in their longitudinal study, found no significant association between identity formation and creative expression when the age of the participants was considered as a moderator variable. Another recent study notes that besides age, gender is a factor that mediates the association between identity formation and creative expression [38]. Interestingly, despite decades of research exploring creativity and creative expression, there is a dearth of research that focuses on persons with disabilities, especially from the Nigerian context. This current study is thus timely as it not only bridges the research gap but also provides advance information on the impact of culture on the creative expression of persons with disabilities. It is therefore the expectation of the researchers that this study will open a new vista of knowledge that will spur further research interest and positively influence policies on creative potential and expression of the creative abilities of persons with disabilities from various socio-cultural backgrounds.

3 Theoretical orientation

This study is framed by Erik Erikson's theory of psychosocial development introduced in the 1950s. *Erikson's theory is an eight-stage theory of development* that details all stages of human development from infancy to adulthood. Each of the *eight stages of the theory are associated with different developmental conflicts* [54]. Although one may argue that Erikson's theory does not focus explicitly on creativity, it should be noted that his theory of psychosocial development connects creativity to resolving identity crises and fostering a sense of self [41], [42]. The concern of this current study is closely linked with the stage of 'identity vs. role confusion' in terms of the socio-cultural relationships of persons with disabilities. *According to Erikson's theory*, identity formation and the role of exploration are described as the foundation for creativity, where an individual can explore different roles based on prevailing circumstances, regardless of disabilities, thereby leading to the identification and development of new creative ideas and approaches to resolving their personal and socially constructed challenges. In view of the foregoing, Dollinger and Dollinger [42] remark that Erikson's theory positions creative individuals as those who trust their senses based on their social experiences. Dollinger and Dollinger [42] posit and highlight the importance of solitude as the connection between the inner world and the external environment and as a process needed for generating creative ideas. In other words, based on Dollinger and Dollinger's [42] position, a time of solitary reflection on one's experiences of socio-environmental dynamics could be a fertile ground for the development of creative ideas. This current study is of the belief that persons with disabilities who have experienced unwholesome societal attitudes due to socio-cultural belief systems and perceptions have had an uneven process of identity formation, and this could have implications for the development of their creative ideas and expression of same [2]. Lamentably, there is no research evidence of studies that have adopted a qualitative research approach to exploring

creative expression among persons with disabilities through the lens of cultural heritage and identity formation. Hence, this study.

4 Method and materials

4.1 Research approach

This case study adopted an exploratory research design. Olawale, Chinagozi and Joe [55] assert that an exploratory research design is used to investigate and provide a clear cut understanding of existing phenomena to identify key issues for the purpose of knowledge creation and resolving complex problems. In addition, this case study adopted the interpretivist paradigm [56], which emphasizes the understanding and construction of social reality based on the subjective experiences, meanings, and interpretations of an individual or group of people [57], [58]. In this study, the creative expression based on the dynamics of cultural heritage and identity formation of two individuals with a disability was the phenomenon of research interest. The qualitative research approach was considered appropriate because it provided the study participants with the opportunity to express their concerns about their social constructions, disabilities, and creative expressions.

4.2 Sample and sampling procedure

A convenient sampling procedure was adopted to select Oyo state out of the six states of the Southwest geopolitical zone in Nigeria. The Southwest geopolitical zone comprises of Ekiti, Lagos, Ogun, Ondo, Osun, and Oyo States. The six states are traditionally occupied by *Yorùbá people, with a rich cultural heritage and language that is expressed through various customs, practices, and traditions. In the selected state, the researcher purposively selected Ibadan, which is the capital and most populous city of Oyo State. Lastly, a purposive sampling procedure was used to select individuals with physical disabilities within the Ibadan metropolis. The selected participants were Yorùbá visual artists with physical disabilities.*

Table 1. Specific characteristics of the study participants.

	Participant A	Participant B
Type of disability	Physically disabling condition that affects the right limbs	Diplegia, a speech disorder, and hard-of hearing (multiple disabilities)
Age of onset of disability	11 years old	4 years old
Current age	54 years old	29 years old
Gender	Male	Male
Cause of disability	Poliomyelitis	Jaundice

Type of creativity	Art works (painting and drawing)	Art works (painting and drawing)
Type of school attended	Regular school	Special school and a technical school
Marital status	Married	Single
Highest educational Qualification	College diploma in Fine and Applied Arts	Vocational education

Note: Diplegia is a form of paralysis or weakness affecting symmetrical parts of the body, often the legs, though it can also involve the arms, and is frequently associated with cerebral palsy.

4.3 Data collection

In this study, data was collected through keen observation of the environmental and the socio-cultural footprints of the study area, as well as through a semi-structured audio-recorded interview with the two identified participants on a one-on-one basis. Data collection lasted for about two weeks due to the distances between the two participants and their availability. The author ensured that the audio-recorded semi-structured interviews were specific, focused, and discursive to capture the implications of cultural heritage and identity formation on the creative expression of the study participants adequately. Although an interview guide was used, the interview protocols were flexible, as advanced by Cohen et al. [59]. The interview guide provided the opportunity to obtain the demographic information of the respondents, namely the type and cause of their disability and the time of onset, their marital status, their highest educational qualification, and their age at their next birthday, among other relevant questions (See Table 1).

4.4 Data analysis

Analysis of the data collected began with verbatim transcription of the audio-recorded semi-structured interviews into a Microsoft Word document as text. The process of verbatim transcription was done by the authors, with several replays of the voice recordings, to ensure appropriateness of the verbatim transcriptions, because the interviews were conducted in the Yoruba language. Confirmation of the transcripts was provided by an independent reviewer. Afterwards, the transcribed text was coded systematically and analyzed thematically [59]. An iterative process was followed [60], which involved six interactive phases which included familiarisation with the data collected, the generation of initial codes, searching for themes, revision of the identified themes, definition and naming of the themes, and a presentation and discussion of the themes. The anonymity and confidentiality of the study participants were ensured during this process, as they were coded and identified as Participants A and B, respectively. The reoccurring themes in the analyzed data were identified following the iterative process and summarization of the data collected. The themes generated formed the basis for the responses to the research questions raised for this study.

5. Results

Analysis of the data collected from the study participants in response to **research question one** revealed the emergence of two themes, which were: (i) Cultural belief system and superstition, and (ii) Cultural awakening. The data obtained and analysed confirmed that there were elements of the *Yorùbá* cultural heritage that inspired creative expression among persons with disabilities. Each of the themes that responded to research question one are carefully presented below.

(i) Cultural belief system and superstition

Belief systems remain one of the essential attributes of every culture. Therefore, a belief system and superstitions are also attributes that define the *Yorùbá* people in Southwest Nigeria. This belief system has implications for disabilities, as espoused by the participants. The participants of this study revealed that their lived experiences, growth, and creative potential had largely been influenced by cultural factors. In support of the foregoing, Participant A (male, 59 years) said:

The cultural belief system among the Yorùbá significantly impacted on my emotions and social belonging. The belief that persons with disability are because of punishment by gods was a challenge I faced while I was a child.

In support of Participant A, Participant B (male, 29 years) added that:

People do not like to associate with people with disabilities. I am beginning to understand that it was because of the superstitions about why I have disability. But it is not my fault.

Participants A and B both expressed the position of the *Yorùbá* people about their beliefs about gods and how the *Yorùbá* culture referenced the various gods of the land. The submission showed that there was severe punishment for individual(s) who disobeyed the various gods of the *Yorùbá* people. Members of the community rarely associated with whoever was believed to be receiving punishment from the gods. However, while there was excommunication of those who were perceived to be being punishment by the gods, the *Yorùbás* believed that appeals could still be made to the gods for healing. This was revealed when Participant A remarked on the efforts made by his mother to ensure that everything possible was done to heal him using traditional medicine. Participant A remarked:

*I could remember vividly that my mother would cry and pray for my healing when massaging my leg with *Àgbo*. (*Àgbo* is a type of *ethnomedicine* which involves healing with herbal remedies and a spiritual approach and practicing holistic well-being).*

This use of *ethnomedicine* was an effort to ensure that Participant A conformed to societal norms so that he did not experience ostracization. Despite this, the participants of this study shared their experiences of social isolation and ostracization as a result of their disabilities.

Participant A stated that:

Even when I manage to associate with other children of my age, their parents wouldn't allow me because of the belief that I would negatively affect their children. Those parents felt that their children may be affected if they interact with me because my condition was due to punishments being served to my family by the gods of the land.

Participant A added that:

Crying daily was like a meal to me because of the way I was portrayed, even when I started school at the age of 12. I was called Ìdí gan lébè (Ìdí gan lébè is a colloquial term used to describe someone who limps derogatorily. They limp because of their posture, which holds them at a 75-degree angle, and they drag one leg).

According to Participant B:

People used to send me away and say different things to me, which hurts me, and because I can not really hear what they say, except I use my hearing aids. I can perceive they don't like me through the way they act and their expressions.

Participant B also added that:

It has been difficult. My childhood was lonely; I do not have friends except my family. Even till now, I am always at home before I started this shop, where I display my drawings and paintings for sale.

Both study participants posited that the rejections and social isolation they experienced influenced their creative potential. Participant B said this:

I would say isolation, stigmatisation, and social outcast influence my visual creativity and artistic expression.

(ii) Cultural awakening

The participants were of the view that their culture, Yorùbá, extolled the virtue of hard work and frowned upon indolence, disabilities notwithstanding. Participant A recounted a statement made by his uncle to demonstrate this. He said:

An uncle, who always appreciates my drawings, once said a Yorùbá proverb that says 'inú ìgbàgò nì màrìwò tí se ẹ̀ṣọ́' (It literally means, 'out of the thorns, the palm fronts flourish'). He said the proverb to encourage me to keep working on my artistic talent.

In like manner, Participant B remarked that:

Regardless of disability, Yoruba culture detests laziness and encourages hard work and creativity. That is why they say in Yoruba that 'Ọ̀lẹ̀ ò le gbé ilú wa' (lazy person is not allowed to live in our town). That statement spurs my creativity in drawing and artwork, since that is what I am good at.

A follow-up question was posed to Participant A about the implications of his cultural heritage on his creative potential. According to him:

I would say that cultural awakening through poems and songs we were taught then have positive influence on my perception and creativity.

Participant A was then asked if he could remember and recite the poems. He answered affirmatively, and recited the first two verses of 'Ìse l'ogun ise' by Ọ̀dúnjọ [61]. See below:

Table 2. Excerpt of 'Ìse l'ogun ise' by Ọ̀dúnjọ [61].

Yoruba language	English translation
<i>Ìsé l'ògùn ìsé,</i>	Work is the antidote for poverty,

<i>Múra s'ísẹ ọrẹ mi.</i>	Work hard, my friend.
<i>isẹ la fí n'denì gíga.</i>	Work/labour is the major tool for elevation and greatness.
<i>Bí a kò bá rẹni fẹyìn tì,</i>	If we do not have anyone to lean on,
<i>Bí ọlẹ làárí.</i>	We appear indolent
<i>Bí a kò bá rẹni gbẹkẹlẹ,</i>	If we do not have anyone to support us,
<i>A tẹra mọ'sẹ eni.</i>	We simply work harder.
<i>Ìyá rẹ lè lówó lówó.</i>	Your mother might be rich.
<i>Bàbá rẹ lè lẹsin lèkàn.</i>	Your father may have a stable full of horses.
<i>Bí o bá gbó'jú léwọn,</i>	If you depend/rely on them,
<i>O tẹ tán ni mo sọ fún ọ!</i>	You are close to shame and disgrace, I tell you!
<i>Ohun tí a kò bá jì'yà fún,</i>	Whatever one does not work hard/labour to earn,
<i>Şé kìi pé lówó eni.</i>	Usually does not last.
<i>Ohun tí a bá fara sişẹ fún,</i>	Whatever one seriously labours for,
<i>Níí pé lówó eni.</i>	Usually lasts with one.

Drawing from the information obtained, it was evident that despite the attitudes towards persons with disabilities, the *Yorùbá culture encouraged people to work, with the aim of them being economically independent. The participants thus found encouragement and motivation through various culturally specific proverbs and poems. These fostered their creative expression, which they leveraged to achieve financial independence. The foregoing showcased self-awareness, which was the recurring theme that emerged through the iterative processing of the data obtained in response to **research question two**, which aimed to provide exposition on the implications of identity formation on creative expression. The participants also had the following to say:*

Participant B commented that:

At early age, I resort to drawings because I was lonely and angry. My drawings then were about fighting because then I wished I could fight people because of their attitude to me. When I make such drawings, I feel so good with myself then.

Participant A similarly said:

... As a young child, I spent more time drawing to be free from negative attitudes from people.

The foregoing showed that the creative potential of the participants was motivated by their environmental circumstances. Although they experienced negative societal attitudes due to their disabilities, they derived positive creative energies from their unpleasant experiences. Both study participants further acknowledged the role of their schooling in their creative expression. According to Participant B:

I became conscious of my creative potential while in school. My creative arts made me have friends because they were always fascinated by my drawings. They would always come around me whenever I am drawing.

Participant B added that:

... When I was at Cheshire Home School (a special school in Ibadan), I noticed people who come to visit the school always appreciate my drawing and artworks. Such gesture makes me feel so happy, and I feel so elevated in my spirit.

Unlike Participant B, self-awareness about Participant A's creative expression was brought to the fore by his uncle's statement. Participant A stated that:

I became conscious of art skills when an uncle saw some of my drawings. He made a statement (a Yorùbá adage) that struck me and changed my orientation about my creative abilities. My uncle said, 'Inú ikòkò dúdú ni èkọ funfun ti jáde' (from a black pot comes a white corn meal).

The statement made by the uncle implied that, regardless of his condition, Participant A could make beautiful artworks. The adage made by the uncle ignited a consciousness in Participant A about his artistic abilities.

Now, I do more of artworks and painting to speak to positive narratives, love, and care. I now have people come to buy my drawings and paintings. I don't beg people to interact with them again; my artworks bring them.

The findings in response to research question two clearly showed that the participants of this study became more conscious of their creative potential through socio-environmental factors.

6. Discussion

Human development across the lifespan is a critical element that cannot be separated from socio-cultural dynamics and principles. Our study sought to provide clarity on the factors that influenced creative expression among persons with disabilities and illuminated the potential influence of cultural heritage and identity formation on their creative expression. Three themes were identified in the data gathered in response to the two research questions, namely cultural belief system and superstition, cultural awakening, and *self-awareness*. We were thus able to establish some factors that influenced the creative expression among the study's participants. Our study found that the cultural belief system of the *Yorùbá people in Nigeria* dictated how members of the community related to and interacted with persons with disabilities. The people superstitiously believed that disability was a form of punishment by the land gods, and they shunned the disabled. This superstition also had a significant impact on how persons with disabilities on *Yorùbá* lands perceived themselves. Indeed, the social construction of disability has shaped the social relationships of persons with disabilities and the effects of such on their

cognitive and psychological well-being is well documented in existing literature [2], [3], [5], [11], [12], [13], [62], [63].

Some studies have revealed that such belief systems have negative repercussions on overall human development and the positive state of mind of persons with disabilities [2], [11], [20], [24]. Contrary to the findings presented in the aforementioned studies, our study revealed that the persons with disabilities who participated in our study found this superstitious belief system to be a springboard for their creative thinking. It thus significantly developed their creative potential. Our findings, therefore, corroborated the assertions by Alacovska and Kärreman [14], Kevers et al. [64], Macy and Johnstone [15], and Schubert [65], who noted that some individuals display creativity potential when environmental circumstances seem unfavourable. For example, Alacovska and Kärreman [14] believe that during unwholesome circumstances, such as the one engineered by negative societal behaviour in the case of persons with disabilities, an individual may rapidly develop creative ideas on how to harness the available opportunities to his/her advantage.

While our study confirmed that creativity and creative expression were significantly influenced by several factors resident in culture and shaped by personal experiences, we further established the impact of cultural heritage on creative expression. Our findings indicated that within the *Yorùbá socio-cultural space, the belief system vis-a-vis religious and ritual practices and other associated cultural practices informed the creative potential and expression of the two participants in our study. The findings established in this current study were in line with the earlier findings reported by Banwo [24], Fayemi [25], Idowu [6], Jean-Berluce [66], Okunade [9], Olu-Osayomi and Adebua [26], as well as Tabuena [67] in their respective studies. Despite the perceived effects of the superstitious belief system on the livelihood and social engagement of persons with disabilities, particularly among the Yorùbá, as espoused by Bolarinwa et al. [3], Idowu [6], Okunade [9], Olu-Osayomi and Adebua [26], and Wahab et al. [4], our study noted that the cultural heritage of the Yorùbá people served as a cultural awakening to all. The participants in our study indicated that expressions, proverbs, or adages in the Yorùbá language, such as ‘Òlẹ̀ ò le gbé ilú wa’ (A lazy person is not allowed to live in our town) and ‘Ìse l’ogun ise’ (Work is the antidote for poverty) by Ọ̀dúnjọ [61] were some of the Yorùbá literary devices that spurred their creativity. Imperatively, every line in Ọ̀dúnjọ’s [61] poem extols the virtue of working hard to have a brighter future. This resonates with the submissions by Adegbindin [5], Adeniji-Neill [68], and Adéyemí [69], who all note that in the Yorùbá culture, poems are indispensable elements for the transmission of core traditional values, and they have historically been used to shape behaviour and social norms. Adéyemí [69] posits assertively that in the Yorùbá culture, oral poetry serves to keep the cultural core values and moral codes alive. Through oral traditions, the Yorùbá poems and folklore serve to entertain and teach the moral values of creativity and hard work.*

Lastly, self-awareness was found as an element of self-identity formation that motivated creative expression in this study. The cultural dimension was found to have shaped the participants’ self-construction and self-image. In other words, the questions of ‘who I am’, ‘how will I function or survive’, ‘what would be my future means of survival’, amongst others, *influenced the identity formation of the participants, and such personal reflection was found to have advanced their creative thinking and creative expression. Over and above this, our study showed that creativity and the expression of creative potential were antidotes to the traumatic experiences that had arisen from negative societal attitudes towards the participants of the*

study. The earlier findings obtained by Alacovska and Kärreman [14], Ludwig [27], Macy and Johnstone [15], and Watermeyer [34] supported this finding of ours. Through creativity, namely the artwork of the participants of this study, these persons with disabilities with creative potential had used their creative potential to carve a niche for themselves and they had leveraged their creative potential and artistic expression to establish positive social networks and relationships for themselves. In other words, these creative persons with disabilities had formed positive self-identities through self-awareness and thus conquered the challenges associated with their identity crises formed as a result of their disabilities [34], [41], [42]. It was impossible to deny the possibility that the creative expression displayed by the two study participants during the process of their identity formation and development of self-awareness was not also influenced by other external factors, such as their ethnicity, gender, and personal interests [35].

However, this study could affirm that the participants' creative expression as a result of their self-awareness was significantly motivated by their socio-cultural dynamics. This finding agreed with that of Piazza [36] and Sica et al. [37], but our current study could not confirm the fact that creative expression among persons with disabilities was a factor of age or gender, as was found in the studies of Barbot and Heuser [38] and Sica et al. [37]. Based on our findings, we could affirm a positive and direct link between identity formation through self-awareness and creative expression. Unfortunately, our finding deviated from what was reported by Dollinger and Dollinger [51], Helson and Pals [53], and Ziller [52]. While Dollinger and Dollinger [51] and Ziller [52] reported an inverse correlation between students' identity formation and creativity, Helson and Pals [53] did not find a significant association between identity formation and creative expression.

7 Conclusion and recommendations

Using the theoretical lens of Erik Eriksons' theory of psychosocial development, particularly the implication of identity vs. role confusion, our study offers valuable insights into the issues of creative expression among persons with disabilities within the *Yorùbá community through the lens of cultural heritage and identity formation*. While this study has recognized the challenges faced by persons with disabilities based on their socio-cultural belief system, it has also confirmed that while creativity is an innate ability that can be enhanced by various factors, the creative expression found among the persons with disabilities who participated in the study was largely influenced by three sub-factors: specifically (i) cultural belief systems and superstition, (ii) cultural awakening (which occurred as a result of various Yoruba cultural chants, folktales, poetry, prose, and song), and (iii) self-awareness. The findings of this study underscore the need to intensify awareness and sensitization programs to demystify the causes of disabilities, especially among the conservative people on Yoruba lands who still live the close-knit traditional lives of old. The requirement for these programs places many responsibilities on both governmental and non-governmental agencies, as they must design and implement culturally fair programs that will demystify the causes of disabilities in relation to the cultural deities and punishment from the gods of the land. The relevant government agencies and ministries, such as the Ministry of Arts and Culture, should develop programs in collaboration with the National Orientation Agency and the *Joint National Association of Persons with Disabilities (JONAPWD)* to ensure that proper sensitization about disabilities reaches the rural communities on Yoruba lands. In addition, such awareness and sensitization

programs should also present and advance the potential of persons with disabilities in terms of how creative such individuals can be when their socio-environmental factors are conducive to their creativity.

Persons with disabilities who are in the creative industry should be modelled in the various awareness and sensitization programs to ensure positive outcomes for these grassroots sensitization programs. Such effort would serve as a motivation factor for members of the community and encourage yet-to-be identified persons with disabilities to be creative. Additionally, we recommend that the Ministry of Arts and Culture should work in synergy with the National Orientation Agency (NOA) and the National Directorate of Employment (NDE) in Nigeria should organize art exhibitions for persons with disabilities to showcase their creativity and sell their creative products. Hosting periodic creative exhibitions would further spur the creative interests of many persons with disabilities, create a stream of income for artistic and creative persons with disabilities, and increase the social capital available to these persons with disabilities. Since creative expression is therapeutic and it serves as a means of social integration for the participants of our study, we recommend the need for counselling psychologists, mental health professionals, and social workers, among others, to advance creative art therapy for persons with disabilities. Through such an approach, persons with disabilities, especially those with acquired forms of disability, could have a rapid adjustment to their form of disability and quickly develop a positive sense of self-identity. It should be noted that the foregoing recommendation is not strictly applicable to Nigeria alone, and other African communities and nations could also consider our recommendations. It is our belief that adoption of the recommendations would help foster the realisation of the 2030 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals in Africa.

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