

Puppetry as a Pedagogical Tool in Developing Imagination for Kindergarten Children: KSA Vision 2030

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ABSTRACT This study aimed at investigating the effectiveness of employing puppetry as a pedagogical tool in developing imagination for kindergarten children. Thirty-six kindergarten children were recruited from two public kindergarten schools in Riyadh city, during the academic year 2019-2020. Children were randomly divided into two groups of experimental and control, with equal number of children in each group (n=18). The research used the quasi-experimental approach due to its suitability to the nature of the research, which relies on the experimental design based on two groups, one experimental and the other is control, and by using the pre- and post-testing for the two groups. t-test was used. As predicted, puppetry resulted in increasing creative thinking skills (fluency, originality and imagination).

INTRODUCTION

Puppetry is one of the arts related to the human imagination since its first date (Gupta 2020). Puppet making can be an open exploration of creativity and play-based imagination (Çaðanađa and Kalmi° 2015). The strength of using puppets lies in the ability they have to move and speak (Bravo and Cisterna 2020). Puppet theatre, directed at children, is a performing art that blends several arts such as composition, design, modelling, execution, directing, acting, and animation (Aronoff 2005). It is a theatrical style that does not differ from the performing arts, but rather, collaborates with them in developing multiple skills to achieve the integration of theatrical performances, which moves the child to many imagined worlds that increase their dazzle with work, attachment to its subjects, and the removal of boredom that may afflict them. So the puppet theatre is devoted to achieve this integration (Kröger and Nupponen 2019). Very young learners feel more relaxed and motivated when puppets are being used in lessons due to the 'affective filter', which blocks learning (Bravo and Cisterna 2020). A child, by nature, likes fantasy and sensual things that he or she receives from his or her surrounding worlds other than the one in which he or she lives. Theatre in general, and puppet theatre in particular, possesses distinct theatrical characteristics such as theatrical areas, decorations and make-up, accessories,

sound and light effects, costumes and other characteristics in order to maintain the child's focus and attention in an interesting and enjoyable manner that achieves integration and interaction for children within the show represented on stage (Ahlcrona 2012).

Hence, puppetry is one of the most important dramatic techniques that can be used in directing theatrical performances directed at young children. The production of this type of art requires the skill of the maker and the creative vision in the continuous lines of players, artistic designers, and a holistic visualisation of dolls of all shapes and types (Moss 2013).

Theatre is very close to the children's interests mentally, emotionally, sensibly, and kinaesthetically, as long as it uses dwarf animals in different dramatic formulae that oscillate between tragic and comedic, and are presented in various dramatic situations that combine beauty and antithesis, seriousness and humour. Theatre also occupies childish, small human beings that vibrate physically, musically, and with scenography in an interesting way, which arouse laughter, and then children enjoy entertainment benefit, especially since this children's theatre has artistic foundations and rules that differ from traditional ones (Hamre 2012).

Puppet theatre is seen as one of the types of drama that concerns children through a prepared theatre in which different types of dolls move to deliver amusement and enjoyment to children in order to achieve the goals drawn by the writ-

er and educational director (Keogh et al. 2008). It is also one of the educational means that are concerned with children's interests to gain excitement and achieve direct impact through players with acting abilities to learn and persuade together. Based on the foregoing, the common denominator of puppets and puppet theatre is to enrich the children's experiences in an interesting and artistic way that means change and creativity in the various drama activities (Lowe and Matthew 2000).

Problem Statement

Despite the importance of child theatre, and the role it plays, in the Arab world it still suffers from many problems and difficulties that impede its role in the hoped-for way, and there are many questions that arise in the light of the changes that the theatre world is witnessing today. These questions include, so what, still the stories of animals, Aladdin, the magic box, and the magic woman are the topics that attract the child of the third millennium? Are the techniques and methods of viewing these presentations present in parallel to the views surrounding the child's world today, in which the techniques of presentation, the media of communication, the abundance of information and high-tech cinema films play in the production of watching and science fiction? Likewise, does a child today communicate with performing styles and songs that complement the theatrical performance that has almost not progressed or developed for many years? There is an urgent need for the necessity to develop the play aimed at the audience of children in the Arab arena, and to load the child's theatre with large and deep tasks that keep pace with the culture of the Arab child, which is exposed to cheap artistic currents that threaten the sobriety of this culture.

Aim of the Study

This study aimed to investigate the effectiveness of employing puppetry as a pedagogical tool in developing imagination for kindergarten children.

Literature Review

Child theatre is that theatre that serves childhood, whether adults or young people reside in

it, as long as the goal is to entertain the child, and stimulate his or her knowledge, or it is intended to diagnose the child with representational roles and dramatic situations to communicate with adults or children (Luckenbill 2013).

Children's Theatre Concept

The child's theatre is mixed between adults and children (Majaron 2002). This means that adults compose and produce for the young as long as they possess activation skills, directing and stage management techniques, while young people represent and express the language and movement and embody the characters directly or indirectly, depending on the masks (Lowe and Matthew 2000). Hence, the young theatre is the child's theatre as long as the adults perform the framing process, and it is also the child's theatre, if it is a theatre that the child performs in acting, directing and composition. Hence, the child's theatre depends on imitation and simulation, and at other times it depends on artistic creativity and aesthetic production (Dunst 2012).

Child Theatre Characteristics

Child theatre is characterised by a number of characteristics that make it acceptable to children and be influential for them. The most prominent of which are the ease of plot and its relevance to the child's age, the clarity of the characters, their roles and their moral characteristics, that the events proceed naturally without speeding up or making, the beginning must be interesting, the moves are appropriate and the end a joyful one in which good triumphs over evil, interest in interesting stories, ease, simplicity and clarity of dialogue, appropriate rhythm of events, and so on (Dunst 2014). The child's theatre depends on movement mainly, more than relying on dialogue, regardless of its brilliance and distinction, because the movement on the stage arouses the child's curiosity and interest, and brings them pleasure, and the presentation of events in the child's theatre precedes its description, or informing about it, through the mediation of the actor or narrator, and it cannot be overlooked. What role comedy plays in the success of the show, provided that it is embodied, clear, without ambiguity, or incomprehensible linguistics (Hackling et al. 2011).

Child Theatre and Creativity

Child theatre is one of the most important educational methods that help build the personality of young people at an early stage, in addition to its role in improving his or her artistic and aesthetic taste (Banerjee et al. 2016). It provides this theatre through the drama (Uçus Güldali 2016) that is rich in information presented to the child in a dramatic format (Goldstein 2018). There are many plays that place upon themselves the responsibility of presenting vivid images from reality to this young recipient, as well as seeking to root culture and art in them, and put it face to face with some concepts and basic structures that affect all aspects of life, and it also develops their critical sense from a young age (Luckenbill 2013). These presented works contribute to activating the child's memory, by making them interact with the presented theatrical presentation, so one sees them discussing the issues before them, which are mostly inspired by their social reality (Feldman 2019). Psychologists have understood in their studies that the theatre has an effect on cleansing the soul, because the theatrical representation treats many of the psychological diseases that the child suffers from, and they work on discharging all their emotions and psychological charges (Lowe and Matthew 2000). Besides, the shy child gains self-confidence and abandons their introversion and selfishness in the crucible of group cooperation (Feldman 2019). They are also distanced from criminal tendencies, because allowing children with disorders to act out situations embodied in them paves the way for gaining self-confidence (Goldstein 2018). When a student identifies a role, they are, in fact, venting from the state they are suffering from, then its control over them and their psyche will cease. In addition to this, one finds that the child's theatre allows the discover of their abilities, talents and tendencies, and gives them a wide scope for expressing themselves, and their assumption of many different roles, which enables them to acquire various socially diverse experiences (Majaron 2002).

It is recognised that a child today possesses an intelligence capacity that exceeds previous generations, as a result of the tremendous scientific breakthroughs in all fields (Goldstein 2018), so when presenting a theatrical perfor-

mance, it is necessary to strive to deal with it in a deep and serious manner because the child of this generation has a high ability to interpret what they see. They must stimulate their mind to think, discover and conclude, and move away as much as possible from fairy tales that may not be useful to them in their future life (Douglas and Michael 2020). Child theatre also provides young people with an opportunity to think, create and search for solutions alongside the actor and juvenile (Bernier 2005). This is the mature state in theatrical work. It is also supposed to present a text that does not answer all questions, but rather includes a number of challenges, far from ready-made solutions (Goldstein 2018). This, in turn, gives the half presentation and the child searches for the other half, in order to activate their mind and imagination. Thus, the child's theatre reaches the young spectator beyond the theatrical view, so that its effect remains with them until after the visual, motor and musical interruption is interrupted, and they take this with them to the street and school, and it does not end once the work is finished and this is exactly why there is an audience for a real play, and not a negative audience (Ahlcrona 2012)

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were tested:

H1. There will be significant differences between the two groups (experimental and control) in fluency in post testing in favour of the experimental group.

H2. There will be significant differences between the two groups (experimental and control) in imagination in post testing in favour of the experimental group.

H3. There will be significant differences between the two groups (experimental and control) on originality in post testing in favour of the experimental group.

METHODOLOGY

This study seeks to provide an answer to this question on what is the effect of puppetry as a pedagogical tool in developing for kindergarten children.

Data were collected from children during the academic year 2019-2020.

Research Model

The research used the quasi-experimental approach due to its suitability to the nature of the research, which relies on the experimental design based on two groups, one experimental and the other control, and by using the pre- and post testing of the two groups (see Fig. 1).

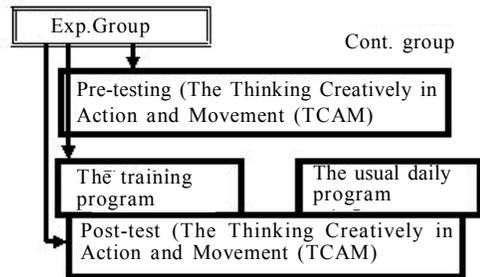


Fig. 1. The proposed model for the research study
Source: Author

Data Analysis

The t-test was employed, run by SPSS V18.0.

Study Group

Thirty-six kindergarten children were recruited from two public kindergarten schools in Riyadh city, during the academic year 2019-2020, in the second term (beginning from February 2020). Two classes, with 36 children in KG2, were randomly selected. Children aged 5 and above (KG2 children) were targeted. Children were randomly divided into two groups of experimental and control, with equal number of children in each group (n=18).

Thinking Creatively in Action and Movement (TCAM)

The creative thinking test with actions and movements is one of the tests developed by Torrance at the University of Georgia in 1977 for children aged 3-7 years, and the test was prepared in an activity format to suit the nature of children of this age group. In the test, the children's verbal and non-verbal responses are accepted, and the test does not require a specific time for the answer, and it aims to measure cre-

ative thinking skills (fluency, originality, imagination). In the fluency score, the total number of appropriate responses for the child in Activity 1, 3 and 4 are recorded, and it must be an appropriate solution to the problem at hand, and includes the score of verbal and kinaesthetic responses expressing movement, as well as includes imaginary, pretend and actual uses of the thing to be used. The score of originality depends on the statistical scarcity of the response, and a 3-point Likert scale (2, 1, 0) was used to estimate the originality, where the responses of children are compared with the responses in the correction guide and the degree of originality is determined for each response, then the scores are collected and placed in the place designated for them. When two or more verbs are combined, three scores are given, as well as three degrees for the response that was not mentioned in the evidence, provided that the response is appropriate, unusual and not used in the normal behaviour of children at this age. The visualisation score uses a 5-point Likert scale (5, 3, 2, 1, 0) to estimate the degree of visualisation. The child gets a score of zero if they do not move, a score of one if they make an inappropriate effort, two degrees if their performance of the role is identical with no expansion in the role, and a score of three when the performance exceeds the required minimum, and the child is given two additional grades, that is, he or she is awarded five scores if the researcher notices clear evidence of the interpretation and clarification of the child for the role when telling a story through movements and actions. Reliability was estimated using the test-re-test method, as shown in Table 1. Reliability coefficients were 0.88 for fluency, 0.82 for imagination, 0.83 for originality and 0.90 for the whole scale.

Table 1: Reliability coefficients using test-re-test method

Scale/Subscales	Reliability coefficient
Fluency	0.88
Imagination	0.82
Originality	0.83
Scale	0.90

Procedure

Written permission was obtained in order to conduct the application with kindergarteners.

Schools were visited in order to inform parents and female teachers about the study. Parents of 40 children were interviewed, and only parents of 36 children provided permission for their child to be included in the study. In this study, the Thinking Creatively in Action and Movement (TCAM) test was completed by children and scored by the researcher. Three female teachers helped the researcher during the application phase, and each of them was responsible for six children, guiding and instructing, correcting them, if needed. The answers given by the children were scored in the sheet.

The application lasted for approximately 40 minutes for the whole group of children. The program is based on Puppet Theatre, which stimulates children's curiosity because of the pleasure of teaching and learning, and pushes it until they work in cooperative work groups. They participate with their peers while presenting educational activities so that they can participate in their community effectively afterwards, and until they develop the concepts of safety and security. Each activity has its own objectives that clarify what should be achieved by studying the activity.

RESULTS

The research used the quasi-experimental approach due to its suitability to the nature of the research, which relies on the experimental design based on two groups, one experimental and the other is control, and by using the pre- and post testing of the two groups. T-test was used.

Findings obtained from the study conducted to determine effects of a puppet theatre program for kindergarten children are presented in the Table 2. Table 2 shows t-test results for the differences in post testing between experimen-

tal and controls groups in in TCAM scale (sub-scales and composite score). The Table shows that (t) values were as follows: Fluency ($t=7.34$, $P \leq 0.01$), Imagination ($t=8.26$, $P \leq 0.01$), Originality ($t=9.42$, $P \leq 0.01$), and total score ($t=15.33$, $P \leq 0.01$).

DISCUSSION

This study aimed to investigate the effectiveness of employing puppetry as a pedagogical tool in developing imagination for kindergarten children.

The results showed that there was a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the children of the experimental and control groups in the total score of creative thinking skills in the post test, after applying the puppet theatre program, which is in favour of the experimental group.

The results also showed the growth of creative thinking skills (fluency, originality and imagination, see Mahmoud 2014) for the children of the experimental group, which reflected the effect of the program on the experimental group in developing creative thinking skills measured by the Torrance test compared to the control group whose members did not show any improvement in creative thinking skills.

Using puppets stimulates learning, builds self-confidence and provides the opportunity to learn communicative skills at an early age (Bravo and Cisterna 2020; Eissa 2018b).

Measured by the Torrance Test, with verbs and movements. This result is consistent with Jones and Reynolds (2011), Hassinger-Das et al. (2017), and Weisberg et al. (2015) who indicated that the main goal of kindergarten is to empower children to play, which is supposed to be the primary creativity and innovation. The

Table 2: t-test results for post-test mean scores of the children in the experimental and control groups on TCAM

<i>Sub-scales</i>	<i>Groups</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. deviation</i>	<i>t-test</i>	<i>p-value</i>
Fluency	Experimental	18	26	1.88	7.34	$P \leq 0.01$
	Control	18	18	2.67		
Imagination	Experimental	18	16	1.42	8.26	$P \leq 0.01$
	Control	18	11	3.62		
Originality	Experimental	18	35	1.18	9.42	$P \leq 0.01$
	Control	18	27	4.12		
Total score	Experimental	18	77	4.43	15.33	$P \leq 0.01$

child, when they perform a specific act, stimulates many of their senses, which leads to the survival of the effect of learning and its use in situations similar to those they went through in educational activities. This is due to the program, which met the experimental group's needs and interests (Al Sayed 2014; Eissa 2017, 2018 a, b). The design of different and multiple educational environments had a great impact in confirming the addition of multiple experiences included in the activities of the program (Eissa 2014), and the use of open-ended stories (Adel 2013; Al Farahti 2018; Mostafa 2013) had a great impact in stimulating children's minds and trying to think of solutions to this problem (Zeynep 2019).

Taking into consideration the problem that this study dealt with and sought to resolve, regarding the necessity to develop the play aimed at the audience of children in the Arab arena, and to load the child's theatre with large and deep tasks that keep pace with the culture of the Arab child, which is exposed to cheap artistic currents that threaten the sobriety of this culture, puppetry is able to elicit information from children who might see themselves reflected in the puppets.

Are the techniques and methods of viewing these presentations present in parallel to the views surrounding the child's world today, in which the techniques of presentation, the media of communication, the abundance of information and high-tech cinema films play in the production of watching and science fiction? Likewise, does a child today communicate with performing styles and songs that complement the theatrical performance that has almost not progressed or developed for many years? There is an urgent need for the necessity to develop the play aimed at the audience of children in the Arab arena, and to load the child's theatre with large and deep tasks that keep pace with the culture of the Arab child, which is exposed to cheap artistic currents that threaten the sobriety of this culture.

CONCLUSION

Puppets used in an educative environment are considered an effective resource for young learners because they integrate all the major dis-

ciplines related to child development such as perceptions, comprehension, movements, coordination and integration with the environment, speech and narration. These results are consistent with the assumptions on which the research relied, that creativity can be developed through training, which is an innate predisposition present in all children, and the superiority of the experimental group in skills (fluency, originality and imagination) may be due to the program's containment of various and interesting activities that stimulated the thinking of children when the researcher used the method of questions. It was diversified in the means and techniques, as well as in the methods of presenting activities, and it raised various types of questions, especially the divergent questions that contribute to stimulating and developing creative thinking skills and providing a suitable psychological environment to stimulate creative thinking based on establishing a relationship based on respect, love and confidence in children's abilities, and not to ridicule them. Their questions and answers, and granting them an atmosphere of freedom that is a necessary condition for the creativity process, in addition to the atmosphere of fun and play that prevailed in the activities, especially when the researcher asked the children to mention the largest number of responses to a situation, the children showed great interaction with this type of question that challenges their abilities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the results of this study, some recommendations are presented below. Imagination is an innate predisposition present in all children, so it should be developed through training. This can be done in kindergarten using puppet theatre. Puppetry is diversified in the means and techniques, as well as in the methods of presenting activities, so teachers in the kindergarten classroom should make use of a lot of this. Considering that puppetry is an interesting method of conveying knowledge to children, curriculum programs should be arranged accordingly and improvements should be made.

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