

Educational Theater: Components and Objectives

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Abstract

Regardless of the contexts in which educational theater is employed, whether within educational institutions or in standalone theaters, it is considered one of the most significant methods of modern education. However, this theater, which places considerable emphasis on children, is built upon several pillars and components aiming to achieve its predetermined objectives within the educational process. Therefore, in this article, I have attempted to precisely define the concept of educational theater by distinguishing it from other terms that overlap conceptually, such as school theater and pedagogical theater. Subsequently, I have examined the most important components of educational theater, which, when properly considered, contribute to achieve the desired objectives of this dramatic work.

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1. Introduction

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Nowadays, it is widely recognized that theatrical art represents one of the most effective educational and pedagogical tools that influence children while simultaneously attracting them. This is because theater is a composite art form in which various artistic elements merge, including literature (both poetry and prose), drawing, music, and songs, among other elements that attract children and develop their cognitive and emotional abilities.

Furthermore, there are numerous intersections between children's characteristics and theater, such as imitation behaviors, simulation tendencies, immersive qualities, entertainment, play, and imagination, among other aspects that connect them. Therefore, theater is considered one of the most suitable artistic forms for interaction and communication with children, aims at shaping their psychological, intellectual, and moral personalities. Consequently, a connection has been established between theater and school to complement the roles they both play in relation to child. Although theater is not new to the school environment, what is new is the unique interaction that has emerged between theater and education within the school context, where theater has become an educational medium "that serves learners by achieving objectives that combine enjoyment, recreation, stimulation of motivation for knowledge, engagement of emotions, and activation of the senses. It employs performance within the educational institution to achieve predetermined objectives that teachers implement within classroom settings or during various occasions." (Bushlalg, 2008-2009)

Thus, incorporating theater into the educational system represents an effective and influential method; it is a qualitative addition that supports academic achievement and participation in the educational efforts. Theater has become an educational medium that contributes to develop learners' cognitive abilities. This new role of theater related to educational institutions emerged from the development in the field of education and psychology. Whereas schools previously focused on imparting knowledge to students through lecturing and rote learning by the teacher, it has now become essential for students to participate in acquiring knowledge through experience and engagement. This is embodied through what is called the "theatricalization of curricula" or "theatricalization of subjects," which means adapting lessons to be presented in a theatrical form.

2. Concepts' Clarification:

The concepts of child theater, pedagogical theater, educational theater, and school theater have become intertwined. Therefore, we consider it necessary to discuss these overlapping terms related to educational theater in some details:

2.1 School Theater:

As defined by specialists, school theater is: "a form of activity performed by students in their schools under the supervision of their teachers, either inside the classroom or outside, in the theater hall and on its stage, or outside the hall in the school garden or schoolyard." (Khidr, 1992, p. 24).

It is also defined as: "an educational, instructional, and learning theater, considering it as one of the components of the unit of artistic education and technological development." (Kanan, 2011, p. 110).

Additionally, it is: "that theater which employs performance within the educational institution (elementary and preparatory schools) as a theatrical technique to achieve predetermined objectives, whether general or specific, targeting intellectual, emotional, sensory, and motor aspects, with the teacher supervising this school theater." (Al-Maliki, 2010, p. 172).

Therefore, school theater is an educational and instructional activity conducted within the school environment, whether as a formal subject to the teaching process or as an activity freed from the conventional lesson structure. It encompasses all activities determined by the school, and its scope is the educational institution regardless of its form.

2.2 Child Theater:

Child theater is: "a well-known theatrical genre worldwide, specifically directed toward children, with the purpose of meeting children's needs in the fields of entertainment, knowledge, and education." (Aliyah & Mansouri, 2017, p. 104).

Based on the above, we find that child theater is broader than school theater because it extends beyond the educational institution to more expansive external spaces. Additionally, those who conduct it may come from outside the educational institution, unlike school theater, which does not extend beyond the educational institution (such as kindergartens, elementary schools, secondary schools, etc.), and encompasses all activities determined by the school. Furthermore, the sole beneficiaries of school theater are enrolled students, "as school theater is linked to the school, its curricula, and its programs. Therefore, school theater is primarily considered an instructional medium." (Shalul, 2000, p. 69). In contrast, non-enrolled children may benefit from child theater. Additionally, "child theater is more diverse in subject matter and freer in the use of actors and artistic means than school theater." (Allah, 2001, p. 54). Moreover, child theater is often conducted under the supervision of professionals, while school theater is conducted under the supervision of teachers and educators. This is confirmed by the researcher Hassan Shahtah, who states: "There are no decisive differences between school theater and child theater; the objectives are almost identical, and school theater does not necessarily have to comply with curriculum requirements However,

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the difference lies in available resources, acting professionalism, and the spatial environment—though these are not decisive differences." (Shahtah, 2004, pp. 377-378).

2.3 Pedagogical Theater:

"Pedagogical theater is a theater that combines education and pedagogy, playing a significant role in spreading social awareness and building a generation raised with educational and ethical values." (Al-Maliki, 2010, p. 44).

It is also defined as: "an educational art that unites method with objectives, connected to its cognitive and creative foundations, and revives heritage in an educational activity, whether through returning to educational literature, popular literature, symbolic storytelling, or children's songs and choreographed stories." (Kanan, 2011, p. 112).

According to these definitions, we understand that pedagogical theater refers to any theater aims at disseminating principles and good ethics, which is an objective shared by all types of theater.

2.4 Educational Theater:

Some the researchers consider educational theater to be one type of child theater. The researcher Malik Numah Ghali Al-Maliki classified child theater into two types: natural theater and educational theater. According to his view, educational theater is "the theater performed by the student under the supervision of the educator, activity leader, or teacher, with pre-prepared texts within the curriculum. It includes types such as: primary education theater, school theater, university theater, puppet theater, shadow theater, and radio theater. (Al-Maliki, 2010, pp. 173-174).

Other the researchers consider educational theater to be one type of school theater, considering that school theater derives its name from being presented within the school building, and both actors and audience are enrolled students. Thus, their concept of educational theater is as follows: "It is theater presented by children using pre-prepared texts, and this type of theater can be used to present academic materials and curricula in an engaging manner, providing children with a positive impact on the educational process." (Kanan, 2011, p. 111). Additionally, they consider spontaneous drama (creative drama), puppet theater, and pedagogical theater to be among the most important types of school theater.

However, it is noteworthy that the previous definitions are general and do not precisely define the essence of educational theater. According to the researcher Hassan Abd Al-Munim Hamad, the concept of educational theater is based on "using theater as an instructional medium where academic curricula and prescribed materials are presented in a theatrical form, known as 'the theatricalization

of curricula. In this approach, students present simplified theatrical performances either in classroom settings or in the school theater." (Hamad, 2008, pp. 71-72). The theatricalization of curricula refers to "transforming certain study materials into simple performances that students can enact within classrooms under the teacher's supervision." (Al-Suri, 1998, p. 56)

For the researcher Raid Muhammad Salamah Abu Hadaf, educational theater is: "a teaching method in which students perform staged roles under the guidance and participation of the classroom teacher, aiming to deepen understanding, facilitate memorization, and convey information in an engaging and attractive manner." (Hadaf, 2009, p. 16).

According to the researcher Hassan Abd Al-Munim Hamad, this type of theater faces challenges in theatricalizing all curricula, along with a shortage of published texts for this type of theater. Therefore, the Ministry of Education should encourage playwrights to theatricalize academic subjects to advance this theater. It should also focus on preparing a guide for teachers and supervisors of children's clubs that use this theater to facilitate its implementation. (Hadaf, 2009, pp. 71-72).

We can differentiate between school theater and the theatricalization of curricula. In school theater, a group of school students presents theatrical works, not necessarily based on a curriculum, to an audience consisting of their peers and teachers, primarily focusing on satisfying acting hobbies. In contrast, the theatricalization of curricula primarily relies on academic materials, with performances taking place in an appropriate setting that need not be a conventional theater stage. It involves reorganizing the scientific content of academic materials, shaping them into purposeful staged situations and activities while focusing on the ideas to be conveyed to achieve the desired educational objectives, relying on (the teacher, the learner, the academic material, and the teaching environment). In this approach, linguistic activity forms the primary means of communication.

Some view educational theater as the most comprehensive theater type, encompassing all theater that carries an educational message and purpose. Under this category, we can include all other theatrical forms that may extend beyond the educational institution, such as university theater and child theater. All these forms originate from an educational, pedagogical, and ethical principle and can be presented both within and outside the educational institution, as the educational process occurs both inside and outside the school. However, when presented outside the school, it is conducted by professional theater groups aiming to entertain children and instill positive educational behaviors within their minds and souls.

Regardless of how these concepts overlap, educational theater remains that dramatic art directed toward the young, aiming to educate them pedagogically, culturally, and psychologically while creating a world of imagination, excitement, and entertainment.

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3. Components of Educational Theater:

Educational theater is built upon a set of principles and foundations that, when properly considered, lead to the desired objectives, which are represented in the following points:

3.1 Elements of Educational Theater:

Educational theater relies on elements consisting in the following points:

- A. The Teacher: Requires performing a dual role; acting as a teacher of a specific academic subject while simultaneously functioning as the director during the management of staged experiences. Here, the teacher serves as instructor, supervisor, director, and guide.
- B. The student: Becomes an active participant and engaged learner, which is the focal point of the educational process.
- C. Academic Material: Serves as the raw material that the teacher transforms into a staged work in the form of situations and dialogic activities executed by students.
- D. Teaching Environment: Represents the setting where students spend most of their time. The environment of educational theater consists of the classroom and its surrounding internal influences, which students contribute to preparing and setting up.

3.2 Philosophical Foundations of Educational Theater:

Educational theater is based on a set of foundations that must be provided:

- A. Learner activity, effectiveness, and positive participation are the axes of the educational process.
- B. Transformation and processing of the academic curriculum or some of its contents in a staged manner that relies on dialogue and theatrical activity, through which diverse events and situations become tangible, living realities.
- C. Instructional theater depends on utilizing multiple senses of the learner during the teaching process.
- D. Transforming the classroom from a boring place into an appealing place to learners.
- E. The teacher's role changes in educational theater instruction—from being an information lecturer to becoming a guide, planner, and facilitator of the educational process.

F. Consideration of the learner's nature and their intellectual, psychological, social, and linguistic developmental stages, as he's simultaneously participant and performer.

G. The role of educational theater as a living, direct, and influential means of communication affecting behavior, transmitting knowledge, and developing creative behavior.

H. Educational theater addresses many topics and issues with religious and spiritual characteristics; through religious and spiritual guidance, it reinforces positive ethical values and instills behaviors that elevate society and strengthen bonds among its members.

I. Educational theater contributes to provide learners with experiences and information helping them succeed in life and confront present and future challenges.

3.3 The Learner's Nature and Educational Theater:

The learner's developmental nature is one of the pillars considered by educational theater, as the learner is both performer and recipient in educational theater and is the target of this theater. Therefore, it is essential to understand the learner's nature through their various developmental stages so that educational theater aligns with the learner's cognitive, motor, linguistic, social, and moral development. This is achieved through directing and implementing it with scientific educational methods and specifications. The details are as follows:

a. Cognitive Development: it refers to the sum of cognitive abilities and mental systems possessed by the learner according to his age. Among the most important principles that educational theater should consider from this perspective are:

- The learner is naturally active and inclined toward learning. Therefore, educational theater should align with the learner and stimulate their innate curiosity.
- Focus on developing the learner's sense of independence, self-direction, and the abilities of self-guidance and self-discipline.
- The learner is inherently a social being in their cognition, so providing an interactive social structure is essential for the development of his cognition and personality.
- Providing constructive opportunities for learners to interact with peers, perform various roles in staged situations, and encouraging them to follow instructions and listen to others while speaking.

b. Motor Development: Educational theater and its staged situations depend on the learner's motor development nature. Therefore, a set of principles related to this aspect must be considered:

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- Introducing learners to the required motor behavior for them to represent when performing staged roles.
- There are tools and means used in educational theater, and the learner must select the appropriate tool for his level and motor ability.
- The teacher should demonstrate the roles in front of students so they can perform their roles well.
- Implementing motor behavior by incorporating diverse motor activities in educational theater, from which learners acquire new motions and gestures.

c. Linguistic Development: Educational theater relies on language as the primary means of communication. Therefore, the learner's linguistic development nature must be considered according to the following principles:

- Using simple Arabic that is close to the learner to reinforce standard classical Arabic and avoid colloquial language.
- Educational theater relies on communication elements: the sender is the teacher and performance group, the recipient is usually the learner as audience and performer, and the message is the concepts and values to be conveyed to the learner.
- Allowing learners to express themselves in standard classical Arabic in improvisational situations.
- Focusing on the learner's linguistic abilities and translating gestures and signs into audible words.

d. Social Development: it is a process of interaction through which learners acquire the traditions and behaviors prevalent in society by interacting with the educational family. Therefore, educational theater can rely on the following principles that align with the learner's social development:

- Exposing students to social situations, experiences, and problems that can develop their cognition and move them from one social level to a higher and better one.
- Presenting problems that students face inside and outside school through theatrical performance and attempting to find solutions.
- Creating a theatrical work produced by learners, which develops their love for cooperation and interaction with one another.

3.4 The Appropriate Duration of Performance for the Child's Age:

The performance duration should be appropriate for the child's age (in terms of time), as it is well known that prolonged duration generates boredom that seeps into the child, causing him to lose focus. According to global educational specifications, the appropriate time should not exceed forty-five minutes. (Al-Maliki, 2010, p. 176)

3.5 Content Appropriateness to the Child's Age:

The selection of these educational topics should be based on considering the specific age stage of the receiving child to determine the type of experiences, ideas, and issues presented in these educational performances. Neglecting the type of experiences provided can cause confusion or inability for the child to understand and comprehend them. (Al-Rahman, 2013-2014, p. 62).

6. Criteria for Selecting Educational Theater Performances:

The following criteria should be met in educational theater performances presented by children (Ahmad, 2006, pp. 258-259):

- A. The objective of the educational play should be clearly defined.
- B. The play should be in standard classical Arabic.
- C. Words that are familiar to children should be used.
- D. Only necessary words should be included.
- E. Avoid using words with multiple meanings.
- F. It should be appropriate for the student's abilities and interests in terms of style and idea.
- G. Sentences should be short if in prose, or in short meters if in poetry.
- H. The topic should connect with what the student studies in subjects.
- I. Characters should be of a type liked by the student.
- J. The theatrical work should not leave any negative impressions on the student; evil characters should preferably be presented in a way that makes the student mock them.
- K. The topic should be simple.
- L. The beginning of events should be exciting, and the conclusion should be comprehensive and fair.

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M. Children, as many as possible, should be involved in the theatrical work.

4. Objectives of Educational Theater:

4.1 Educational Objective:

Teaching through theater aligns with the learner's (child's) nature and inclination toward movement and play. Children engage in theatrical activity or watch it inside or outside the educational setting, breaking the barrier of monotony and boredom that characterizes the traditional educational process. It lets them to move to a world of enjoyment and pleasure, transforming the rigid study environment into one of vibrant flexibility and attraction. The importance of educational theater "lies in transforming dry material into easily comprehensible content, moving the learner from a passive position to one of absolute positivity, where the learner feels he is an active member in transmitting and receiving information. his interaction with his senses and emotions makes the presented material deeply rooted and confirmed." (Hadafe, 2009, p. 11) Presenting educational ideas in a theatrical form achieves direct experience that transports the learner to the heart of the information and its essence rather than addressing it superficially in its old, boring form. Only then the educational process become an engaging process for the child that combines education, upbringing, and enjoyment, positively impacting his academic achievement and learning abilities.

Educational theater plays typically serve a functional role—presenting scientific material to children in a simplified theatrical form that helps them understand and comprehend. This function resembles what poets do when they compose educational poetry to facilitate memorization.

4.2 Pedagogical Objective:

Educational theater works to form the learner's comprehensive and conscious personality. "Child theater has a profound impact on his upbringing and refinement, holding special value in the individual educational project for the child through imitation, which is the foundation of theatrical art. Just as dramatic art is an unreal imitation of human reality, the recipient will find educational value in the theatrical text that they imitate." (Shahtah, 2004, p. 389) Children are naturally inclined to imitation and will select characters from theater performances that they admire and imitate.

In reality, school theater "not only brings joy and happiness to children but also presents ideals such as loyalty, courage, honesty, heroism, justice, and cooperation." (Hamad, 2008, p. 8) Through children's practice of theater, they learn honesty, the desire to help others, the willingness to participate in group activities, respect for appointments, and other behaviors that contribute to their upbringing and moral development.

4.3 Psychological Objective:

Performance is one of the most important means used to achieve psychological healing, as "a person performing a role in one of these plays or watching them typically leads to reduced psychological tension and relief of repressed emotions. Psychological phenomena that can be addressed through the play include shyness, introversion, and speech defects." (Kanan, 2011, p. 115)

Theater's role is not limited to recreation and entertainment; it is an effective communication medium for expressing ideas or specific feelings through language, body movement, facial expressions, gestures, and speech. Therefore, it serves as psychological therapy with the ability to release repressed emotions and unleash children's suppressed energies. It also works to instill self-confidence in children.

"Drama can serve as a safety valve capable of expelling excess emotions and emotional charges, restoring individual balance, thereby realizing Aristotle's famous theory (the theory of catharsis)." (Khasawneh & Al-Akl, 2012, pp. 196-197)

Additionally, theater can "positively and safely address some of the child's psychological and behavioral problems, such as aggression tendencies, by channeling his excess energy and integrating him into the spirit of teamwork that removes him from isolation and compels him to interact with others to achieve success in the theatrical work." (Khasawneh & Al-Akl, 2012, p. 198)

4.4 Cultural Objective:

Educational theater is an emotional and cognitive vessel that channels students' inclinations and energies. Through practicing or watching theatrical activity, a student's culture develops and his information, about various activities he engages in during his theatrical activity, increases. Since theater is a blend of arts, exposure to theatrical texts increases his linguistic wealth and develops his aesthetic sense. Through training in performance and theatrical delivery, his love for acting increases, along with familiarity with arts such as drawing, theatrical direction, and scenography, among others. Theatrical activity works to "activate theatrical life among students in school, endowing them with the ability to appreciate theatrical performance, love for art in general and theater in particular, and delivering its message to society." (Hamad, 2008, p. 201)

Children's engagement in such artistic activities contributes to develop their creative abilities and unleashing their latent talents, especially if related to acting. It is noteworthy that "many young people possess diverse but restricted talents, and school theater can reveal and unleash them for artistic expression of self and around self, allowing the child to merge with the group, gaze freely, and feel participation." (Zalt, 1998, p. 198)

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4.5 Social Objective:

Educational theater aims to strengthen social relationships between the child and his teacher and between the child and his peers. "The theatrical work in school represents a miniature society model; it involves gathering and loyalty to the group, with all members in one place, which is the theater, and all work toward a specific objective. If this objective is educationally directed, theater can be properly used in the educational process." (Hamad, 2008, p. 54)

4. Conclusion:

We can state that educational theater utilizes performance in school as a means to help students understand lesson materials, representing the connection between academic curricula and theatrical activity.

Theater plays an effective role, performing numerous functions including:

1. Improving learners' diverse academic, linguistic, behavioral abilities.
2. Utilizing these talents: delivery, performance, music, drawing, sculpting, management in educational theatrical plays and elevating aesthetic and artistic appreciation.
3. Being one of the best factors in training students in the art of delivery, performance, mastering pronunciation, self-confidence, and integration into life domains.
4. Breaking the rigidity and boredom of traditional rote teaching, infusing vitality, flexibility, and joy into the educational process.
5. Instilling within teachers a spirit of joy and activity, motivating them to fulfill their duties, making school life more enjoyable, and endowing their work with a new spirit that distances them from the stagnant life incompatible with modern educational approaches.
6. Supporting oral communication skills for expressing oneself, needs, requirements, and inclinations, as well as developing the ability to speak eloquently, express well, and communicate verbally with others when engaging in theatrical work and performing assigned roles or tasks.
7. Utilizing leisure time and enjoying activity periods.
8. Removing tension and anxiety through releasing excess charges and emotions.

9. Developing children's expression and theatrical composition skills, as some children can be assigned to transform a read story into dialogue with some additions they create, serving as an engaging exercise in written expression and theatrical composition.
10. Encouraging students to research and investigate topics addressed by the play through reading books and magazines.
11. Cultivating the aesthetic taste of audience children.

Due to the importance and positive role of educational theater on learners' behavior, many educational administrations worldwide have focused on developing plans and programs to enhance its role at both educational and pedagogical levels.

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