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Abstract

Human beings go through various stages during their growth period, with childhood being one of the most critical stages. It requires special care from both the family and society in shaping the child's personality, as they are the future youth who will contribute to building their community. Children's theater plays a significant role in developing the child's personality and addressing their psychology. It captures the child's attention while delivering messages that align with their intellectual level, providing knowledge, fostering noble values, and instilling good morals alongside entertainment. Therefore, the Algerian society must pay more attention to children's theater and intensify efforts to revive it after the stagnation caused by neglect, intentional or otherwise. This audience is akin to a blank slate, ready to be inscribed upon.

Keywords: *child, discourse, theater, influence, structure*

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Təqdimatın adı: Əlcəzairdə Uşaq Teatrı: struktur funksiyası, təsir və məsələlər

Xülasə

İnsan böyümə dövründə müxtəlif mərhələlərdən keçir, uşaqlıq dövrü ən kritik mərhələlərdən biridir. Uşağın şəxsiyyətinin formalaşmasında həm ailədən, həm də cəmiyyətdən xüsusi qayğı tələb olunur, çünki onlar öz icmalarının qurulmasına töhfə verəcək gələcək gənclərdir. Uşaq teatrı uşağın şəxsiyyətinin formalaşmasında, psixologiyasına müraciət edilməsində mühüm rol oynayır. Uşağın diqqətini onların intellektual səviyyəsinə uyğun mesajlar çatdırmaqla, bilik verməklə, nəcib dəyərləri aşılamaqla və əyləncə ilə yanaşı gözəl əxlaqı aşılamaqla da cəlb edir. Ona görə də Əlcəzair cəmiyyəti uşaq teatrına daha çox diqqət yetirməli, qəsdən və ya başqa səbəblərdən yaranan durğunluqdan sonra uşaq teatrına dirçəlmək üçün səyləri gücləndirməlidir. Bu tamaşaçı boş vərəqə bənzəyir, üzərinə yazılmağa hazırdır.

Açar sözlər: *uşaq, diskurs, teatr, təsir, quruluş*

Introduction

Children's theater is one of the most significant cultural mediums in shaping children's upbringing, given its inclusion of meanings, values, and aesthetic patterns that collectively contribute to the development of their mental, physical, and emotional dimensions. It is an art form that encompasses a variety of elements such as dialogue, movement, and color. Therefore, it can be considered one of the essential activities and effective methods for highlighting children's identity, refining their talents and creativity, and fulfilling their ambitions and desires.

Throughout human development, individuals go through several life stages, with childhood being one of the most critical. This stage requires special care from both the family and society to shape the child's personality by instilling ethical, educational, linguistic, and cultural values to nurture their mental abilities, enabling them to contribute to building their community as the future youth. Hence, it is vital to focus on enhancing the child's intellectual, cognitive, and knowledge capacities.

Research

Among the factors contributing to the formation of a child's personality and addressing their psychology is children's theater, which plays an educational, cultural, and instructional role, regardless of the performer's age, whether adult or child. Children's theater is characterized by its diverse performance venues, such as schools, theaters, cultural centers, and more. It is accessible to its young audience, fulfilling its educational and instructional role by providing knowledge, values, and ethics through entertaining educational and cultural performances. This approach helps achieve the goal of enriching the child's knowledge by capturing their attention using their most important element: play and entertainment (Al-Okasha, 2022).

Child Psychology

Psychologists have defined childhood as a crucial psychological stage for individuals. This has prompted them to guide and educate caregivers on fostering children's artistic expressions, which articulate their emotions and enhance their interaction with others. Families and communities must contribute to a child's development by imparting knowledge, instilling noble values, and cultivating virtuous morals while focusing on nurturing their intellectual capacities (Smash, 2022).

This is echoed by Mr. Simash Sayed Ahmed, who affirmed: "A child needs activities that develop their intellectual abilities and nurture an aesthetic upbringing that enables them to carry forward the legacy of their predecessors." Humans pass through various stages that influence their physical, psychological, and behavioral growth, all of which are affected by and impact their environment. According to clinical psychology professor Alfatt Haqi: "This dynamic environment is not only a source of physical nourishment but also a provider of intellectual and psychological sustenance (Alfatt, 1996)."

A child needs specific resources to enhance their intellectual and cognitive abilities, drawing from the cultural elements of their environment. It is essential to equip them well during this stage to face the future with determination and strength.

Children's Theater: Concept and Origins

Childhood is the flourishing stage in a person's life, marking the initial phase that ends upon reaching adulthood and transitioning into a new stage of life. This period deserves special attention, as it forms the foundation upon which individuals build their scientific and life knowledge through guidance, education, and instruction. Childhood leaves a lasting impact by instilling principles, values, and morals in a child, enabling them to contribute to the future development of a society we aspire to be built on solid foundations (Hamada, 1985).

Dr. Ibrahim Hammada defines children's theater as "a designated and prepared space for presenting theatrical performances created specifically for children. The main criterion for this designation is the child audience for whom the plays are produced. Children's theater is a serious form of theater with fully integrated artistic elements, beginning with the playwright, connecting to the director, set designer, and actors, and ultimately reaching the audience. It provides a similar experience to that of adult theater (Al-Jabri, 2002)."

Children's theater aims to stimulate a child's knowledge and develop their intellectual and emotional abilities. It serves childhood, regardless of whether performed by adults or children, as

long as the goal is to entertain, educate, and inspire children's knowledge, experiences, and physical sensibilities. This form of theater may involve children acting out roles, dramatizing scenarios, and communicating with others, whether adults or peers. Adults typically write and direct plays for children, leveraging their skills in animation, directing, and stage management. On the other hand, children often act, express themselves through language and movement, and embody characters. A child may also take on writing, directing, and acting roles under the supervision and guidance of adults (Modnan, 2015).

Children's theater alternates between imitation and artistic creativity, focusing on aesthetic production and innovation. Psychology has also delved into studying this age group, emphasizing the role of children's theater in shaping their personalities. It is considered a unique form of theater that blends various styles and conventions tailored for children. This combination aims to deliver a theatrical performance that boosts children's self-confidence by merging multiple artistic approaches to create a dramatic meaning designed for them.

This type of theater stands out for its texts and performances specifically tailored to suit the child's needs and interests (Al-Okasha).

Features of Children's Theater

Children's theater possesses distinct characteristics tailored to the developmental stage of childhood. It primarily targets children under the age of 11, with performances created specifically for this formative period. The plays are typically performed for children aged 3 to 11 and stand out due to unique features that differentiate them from other types of theater. These performances may be delivered by adults for children, children for children, or a combination of both. The defining features include (Al-Jiragh, 2011):

1. **Simplicity and Clarity of Ideas:** The themes are straightforward and easy to understand.
2. **Excitement and Wonder:** Designed to spark curiosity and captivate children's attention.
3. **Simple and Accessible Language:** Ensures the educational and moral messages are effectively communicated.
4. **Dynamic and Joyful Performances:** Involves plenty of movement, dancing, and singing to create an atmosphere of happiness and fun on stage.

The Importance and Goals of Children's Theater

Children's theater is one of the educational and instructional tools that provide children with knowledge, values, and ethics. This is echoed by the writer Mohammed Shaker Al-Jarragh, who states: "*Theater is one of the means to educate children and develop their personalities.*" In addition to the entertainment aspect, which is integral to this age group, the importance of children's theater lies in several key aspects (Issa, 2008):

1. **A Medium for Knowledge and Entertainment:** It combines education with enjoyment.
2. **Enriching Children's Vocabulary:** Helps expand their linguistic repertoire.
3. **Building Self-Confidence:** Encourages children to express themselves and boosts their confidence.
4. **Distinguishing Good from Evil:** Teaches moral values and ethical discernment.
5. **Integrating Shy Children:** Helps withdrawn children engage and participate within a group.
6. **Developing Artistic Taste:** Cultivates an appreciation for beauty and creativity in children.

Hamad Al-Jabri, in his book *Children's Theater in the Arab World*, emphasizes that while children's theater continues to spread and prove its necessity, it is no longer seen as merely a recreational or entertainment activity. Instead, it has gained significant importance, being recognized as essential for healthy childhood development. Many countries now view children's theater as an integral component of a balanced and harmonious childhood.

A Comprehensive Role in Child Development

Children's theater serves as an effective medium for mental, emotional, aesthetic, linguistic, and cultural development. It is a vital tool for shaping children's culture, presenting ideas and concepts through engaging language, whether in prose or poetry, and through captivating performances that integrate music, dance, and singing.

Moreover, children's theater is an artistic institution dedicated to nurturing and developing the young audience's personality. It focuses on various aspects of child development (Abu Hala, 1985):

1. Psychological Development: Understanding and addressing children's behavior and emotional needs.

2. Social Development: Strengthening their sense of belonging to their environment, which plays a crucial role in shaping their personality.

3. Mental and Physical Development: Enhancing intellectual abilities, intelligence levels, and physical well-being.

These factors collectively influence how children engage with or receive theatrical performances. For children's theater to reach its full potential, it must be granted the attention it deserves, aiming to achieve positive outcomes in preparing both young performers and audience members alike.

Goals and Types of Children's Theater

Goals of Children's Theater

Children's theater can simultaneously pursue multiple objectives. However, it often prioritizes a central goal over others, which become secondary. The primary goal remains comprehensive and interconnected with the secondary goals to ensure the play maintains clarity and coherence. The main goals of children's theater can be summarized as follows (Boumlit, Zaaït, 2019-2020, p. 32):

1. Helps Children Understand Their Reality: Encourages awareness of their surroundings.

2. Empowers Children to Recognize Their Role in Changing Reality: Instills a sense of agency.

3. Stimulates Critical Thinking: Encourages intellectual engagement.

4. Promotes Respect for Noble Ideals: Fosters commitment to values.

5. Rejects Outdated Concepts: Encourages questioning traditional yet obsolete ideas.

6. Instills a Spirit of Struggle, Patriotism, and Religious Values: Nurtures cultural and moral identity.

7. Broadens Children's Horizons: Refines their emotions and heightens their sensitivity.

8. Awakens Their Feelings and Brings Joy: Captures their interest while entertaining them.

9. Incorporates Beauty into Their Lives: Enhances their aesthetic appreciation.

10. Prepares Them to Be Creative and Productive Individuals: Encourages innovation and contribution.

11. Creates a Future Audience of Mature Theater Enthusiasts: Develops cultural appreciation for theater.

Types of Children's Theater

Children's theater uses various formats and methods to deliver performances, catering to different age groups and preferences. These performances may involve adults acting for children, children performing for their peers, or a combination of both. Sometimes, puppets are used, adding diversity to the medium and making it adaptable to children's comprehension levels. The main types include (Maroun):

B. Glove Puppetry

This form of puppet theater uses puppets controlled by the performer's hands and fingers, often worn like gloves. These puppets are designed to represent characters in a play. The performances rely more on movement than dialogue, making them simple and engaging for children.

C. Shadow Theater

This involves a white screen or frame illuminated from behind by a lamp. Puppets or figures attached to strings are placed between the screen and the light, casting shadows onto the screen. A storyteller narrates the story, such as *Abu Zayd Al-Hilali*, creating a captivating experience for children and adults alike.

D. Marionettes (String Puppets)

Marionettes are puppets manipulated using strings or rods. A puppeteer, often referred to as the "puppet master," controls the movement and voice of the puppet. These performances allow for more complex storytelling, making them suitable for representing a wide range of characters and themes (Baali, 2016).

Each type of children's theater aims to convey its content in a manner appropriate to the child's developmental stage, ensuring the message is both understood and appreciated.

Children's Theatre in Algeria: Between Emergence and Development

Some historians argue that the first appearance of children's theatre was in France in 1784. However, the pioneers in this field were the Chinese, who became renowned for their sword dances, shadow puppetry, and puppet theatre. Yet, the origins of these models can be traced to the Arab world, where Arab children's theatre featured certain theatrical forms, including the literary genre known as "puppet theatre." The earliest theatre of this type appeared in Egypt on the banks of the Nile over 4,000 years ago.

True children's theatre, however, only emerged in the early 19th century with the work of the author Hans Christian Andersen, considered a genuine pioneer of children's theatre. Andersen produced numerous plays for children, many of which were translated into Arabic (Biter).

In Algeria, children's theatre saw a delay in its emergence during the colonial period. This was due to Algeria's economic and social conditions on one hand and the oppressive weight of colonial rule on the other. At that time, children's theatre was often influenced by French literature, compelling Algerian children to read or watch plays in a language other than their native Arabic. Despite this, the emergence of children's theatre in Algeria during the colonial period coincided with the rise of the Association of Algerian Muslim Scholars. The free schools established by this association incorporated theatre as a cultural activity during school celebrations and religious events. These schools produced notable figures and works that remain part of Algeria's cultural memory, such as Mohamed El-Abed El-Jilali and Mohamed El-Eid Al-Khalifa, who wrote poetic plays for children, as well as Mohamed Salah Ben Atik, Ali Marhoum, and Abdel Rahman El-Jilali, among others (Mertad, 1983).

It can be said that the destructive policies implemented by French colonialism since its invasion of Algeria in 1830 inadvertently contributed to the emergence of children's theatre. French attempts to erase Algerian culture led to the establishment of free Arabic schools, where enlightened school directors or teachers would write plays for students to perform. Most of these plays were tied to specific occasions, often neglected or forgotten without their texts being preserved, under the illusion that they lacked literary value.

This art form flourished and became increasingly active, particularly after the founding of the Association of Algerian Muslim Scholars and the proliferation of free schools. While these plays were not explicitly targeted at children, they were generally suitable for children in form and content. This adaptability might be attributed to the nature of Algerian theatre, which was still in its formative stages at the time.

Children's Theatre in Algeria After Independence

After independence, children's theatre did not achieve the desired level of activity and dynamism until the 1970s, when professional children's theatre emerged more prominently, particularly in the form of puppet theatre. It garnered significant attention and care, with both professional and amateur troupes established by enthusiasts producing diverse works. These productions were showcased during this period in theatres and on television (Jalouli, 2003).

In 1972, a "theatre decentralization decision" was issued, leading to the establishment of regional theatres in Constantine, Annaba, Oran, and Sidi Bel Abbès, in addition to the National Theatre in Algiers. These theatres subsequently created dedicated children's troupes that performed plays for young audiences. During this period, theatrical scripts for children also developed, with numerous plays published by the National Book Company under the "Youth Theatre Series." Notable examples include *Tales of Uncle Najran* and *Little Kouider* by Khairallah Al-Assar, as well as *The Trap* by Ahmed Bouchecha in 1986.

The 1980s and 1990s witnessed a significant surge in children's theatre activity, marked by national festivals and competitions. Children's theatre earned numerous awards both domestically and internationally (Boumlit, Zaait, 2019-2020, p. 190).

Contemporary Algerian Children's Theatre

In the modern era, few writers have ventured into children's theatre. One prominent figure is Ezzedine Jelaoudji, who authored forty plays for children, including *Shadows and Love*.

Themes in Algerian Children's Theatre

Children's theatre plays a crucial role in shaping and nurturing a child's personality. It serves as an influential medium for developing attitudes, inclinations, values, and personality traits. Consequently, its content must be purposeful, promoting educational, behavioral, and moral values. Plays should be presented in a linguistic style appropriate for the child's cognitive level, experiences, and language capabilities. They should also incorporate humor to ensure enjoyment and engagement while avoiding excessive symbolism.

An analysis of Algerian children's theatre reveals that the themes of these plays vary depending on their intended objectives, quality of performance, and representation. Insights can be drawn from *Forty Plays for Children* by Algerian writer Ezzedine Jelaoudji. A review of these plays shows a diversity of themes aligned with their educational goals.

Some key themes include:

- The role of knowledge in life.
- The consequences of lying.
- The importance of tolerance and its impact on life.
- The value of honesty.
- The concept of freedom, even for animals.
- The dangers of prejudice and accusing others of theft.
- The pitfalls of arrogance and pride.
- The virtue of helping others despite personal need, emphasizing altruism, a cherished value in Islamic teachings.

- The outcomes of tyranny and mistreatment.

All these themes converge on a singular educational goal: nurturing children holistically and instilling noble values within them.

Educational Theatre Themes

Educational plays vary in subject matter but share a common goal: educating children. Topics in this category include introducing Arabic grammar rules, simplifying their understanding for young learners, explaining the principles of syntax and morphology, and illustrating the fundamentals and meters of Arabic poetry.

Social Theatre Themes

Social plays address themes such as a son abandoning his mother at the behest of his wife, a woman suffering injustice under Abbas ibn al-Ma'mun, the pursuit of justice, and cases of kidnapping and theft. These socially-driven plays carry educational dimensions, instilling noble values like obedience to parents, treating them kindly in their old age, and encouraging children to embrace virtues such as justice and shun injustice.

National and Patriotic Theatre Themes

These plays focus on national and patriotic themes, offering insights into the Algerian revolution, resistance strategies, the love of one's homeland despite hardships, and the consequences of betrayal. The objective is to instill patriotism in children, nurturing their love for their country and readiness to defend it at all costs.

Heritage Theatre Themes

Plays centered on heritage draw from Arab and popular traditions, aiming to familiarize children with their cultural heritage, particularly Arab and folk proverbs. These plays present heritage themes in an engaging and humorous manner, making them appealing to young audiences (Issa, p. 90).

Religious Theatre Themes

Religious plays focus on instilling religious values in children, nurturing them according to sound Islamic principles, and encouraging them to read and memorize the Quran as a source of enlightenment and guidance.

Animal-Based Theatre Themes

Plays featuring animals aim to introduce children to the sounds, characteristics, and unique traits of different animals. These plays often emphasize the benefits of unity and cooperation, teach children about the intelligence and cunning of certain animals, and instill moral values and high ethics. They provide children with a safe and enriching environment to grow, away from the dangers of the modern era, particularly the challenges of globalization.

Conclusion

Scientific research often begins with questions and hypotheses, leading to findings that reflect the journey of discovery. Between the initial questions and the final conclusions lies the joy of navigating through the maze of ideas, sometimes feeling disoriented and other times approaching the essence of truth. This study has aimed to record and highlight several key findings:

- Children's theatre in Algeria appears to face dissatisfaction from various stakeholders. It remains challenging to provide a general description of its state due to its relative novelty, the lack of in-depth studies, and the absence of consistent and dedicated practice. This issue is not exclusive to children's theatre but extends to Algerian theatre in general.
- Theatre, both in its literary (text) and artistic (performance) forms, serves as an educational, awareness-raising, and entertaining tool that contributes to social balance.
- Promoting cultural and artistic investment can ensure the widespread development of children's theatre culture.
- Encouraging writers and directors dedicated to children's theatre is essential, as their work demands considerable effort and sensitivity in addressing young audiences.

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