The Effects of Children's Drama on Children's Cognitive

Ability and Creativity

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Abstract

Theater is an art form that has been around for centuries and has been used to entertain, educate, and inspire people of all ages. In recent years, there has been a growing interest in the potential benefits of theater for children's cognitive and creative development. Studies have shown that theater activities, such as role-playing and improvisation, can help children develop social skills, emotional intelligence, and self-confidence. However, the effects of theater on cognitive ability and creativity are still not well understood. This study aimed to investigate the effects of children's theater on children's cognitive ability and creativity. Two elementary school classes were recruited for this experiment, with one class (the experimental group) receiving an 8-week children's comedy training program while the other class (the control group) received no intervention. Before and after the intervention, all students completed a series of cognitive ability and creativity tests. The results showed that the experimental group of students had a significant improvement in cognitive ability and creativity, while the control group did not show a significant improvement. These findings suggest that children's theater training can enhance children's cognitive ability and creativity and should be considered an effective tool for children's education. So, this research concludes that children's drama training presents compelling evidence of its potential to significantly enhance cognitive abilities and unleash unlimited creativity. The study convincingly highlights the effectiveness of incorporating this educational tool to foster holistic development and elevate educational achievements in children. Moreover, these findings serve as a catalyst for future investigations into the extensive impact of children's drama training, including its influence on emotional intelligence and social skills.

Keywords: Children's Drama; Cognitive Ability; Creativity; Experimental Study

Introduction

With the vigorous development of China's cultural industry and the trend towards cultural diversity, children's drama as an art form is gradually being recognized and accepted by people (Howard, 2022). Unlike traditional educational methods, children's drama can help children develop comprehensively, improve their emotional intelligence and intelligence quotient, and has unique educational significance (Momeni et al., 2017). In recent years, an increasing number of children's drama performances have been held in various cities, and there have also been more and more children's drama groups established, constantly promoting the development of children's drama. At the same time, the government's support for children's drama has also been continuously strengthened, providing important support and guarantee for its development.

Children's drama is a form of drama specially produced for children. Compared with adult drama, children's drama is more relaxed and interesting, and can arouse children's interest and attention (Celume et al., 2019). Children's drama has unique educational significance in conveying moral education, improving children's emotional intelligence and intelligence quotient (Celume et al., 2020). Unlike traditional educational methods, children's drama can help children better understand and experience knowledge related to morals, ethics, etc. through situational demonstrations, improving children's emotional intelligence and social skills (Loizou et al., 2019). At the same time, children's drama can also cultivate children's language expression ability and imagination, improving their intelligence quotient and emotional intelligence (Corsaro, 2020).

More and more children's plays are being performed in cities, and there are also increasingly more children's theater groups being established, which are constantly promoting the development of children's theater. Many well-known artistic groups, such as children's drama troupes and children's song and dance groups, have launched a series of art works suitable for children to watch. These works not only have a high level of artistic value, but also have unique significance in conveying moral education and improving children's emotional and intellectual intelligence. In addition, the government's support for children's theater has been continuously strengthened. In 2019, the "Notice on Implementing the National Art Fund System" clearly included children's art projects in the scope of support of the National Art Fund, providing important support and guarantee for the development of children's theater.

In addition to the government's support, many educational institutions have also begun to regard children's theater education as an important form of education. In schools such as kindergartens and primary schools, more and more teachers are using children's theater education

to promote the comprehensive development of children. Children's theater education can not only improve children's emotional and intellectual intelligence, but also help them cultivate self-confidence, communication skills, and teamwork spirit. At the same time, many children's theater training institutions have emerged, providing more professional and systematic children's theater education for children. These institutions not only provide rich and colorful drama education courses, but also help children better discover their artistic talents and potential.

Celume et al. (2019) conducted a study to demonstrate the effectiveness of Drama Pedagogy Training (DPT) on the creativity of French children. The study involved 55 fourth-grade children who were randomly assigned to either the Drama Pedagogy Training group or an active control group. Measurements were taken using EPoC (Assessment of Creative Thinking) during pre-test, post-test, and follow-up measurements. Mood valence was evaluated using the SAM scale at the beginning and end of each session. The research results showed significant findings, indicating that Drama Pedagogy Training can enhance children's creativity. Kolovou and Kim (2020) merged drama-based learning with inquiry-based learning through Integrative Drama-Inquiry Learning (IDI). The study revealed that IDI instruction had a significant impact on the achievement of the experimental group compared to traditional teaching. A subsequent qualitative phase indicated that IDI enhanced intrinsic motivation, which in turn influenced student performance. Analysis suggested that the satisfaction of students' psychological needs for competency, relatedness, and autonomy positively affected their motivation, aligning with the principles of self-determination theory. Alfonso-Benlliure et al. (2021) conducted a study with a sample of 222 young people aged 13 to 21. The analysis of this sample revealed that those who had engaged in drama learning for two years or longer demonstrated higher levels of fluency, flexibility, originality, and self-perceived creativity.

Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, proposed by Russian psychologist Vygotsky and Cole (1978), emphasizes the importance of social and cultural environments in children's cognition and development. According to this theory, children's cognitive processes and learning occur through social interaction with others and the use of cultural tools. Human cognitive activity is seen as developing within social contexts rather than independently from society and culture. Vygotsky highlights the role of social interactions in shaping children's cognition. In social interactions, children collaborate with more experienced individuals, receiving guidance and support, and working together through dialogue and cooperation to solve problems and complete tasks (Newman & Latifi, 2021). This social interaction and collaboration contribute to children's

internalization and gradual mastery of new cognitive tools and strategies. Within Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, creativity is also viewed as a product of social and cultural interactions. Children develop creative thinking and problem-solving abilities through interactions with others and the use of cultural tools. This creative development is gradually realized within social contexts, fostered through cooperation, dialogue, and the accumulation of experiences. This article suggests that drama is also a form of social interaction and cultural environment (Marques, 2022), which can have an impact on enhancing children's cognition and development.

Children's theater is an effective tool for children's education as it can convey moral education and enhance children's emotional and intellectual intelligence. However, research on the impact of children's theater on children's cognitive and creative abilities is still limited. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to investigate the impact of children's theater on children's cognitive and creative abilities.

Research objectives

Objective 1: To explore the impact of children's theater on children's cognitive abilities.

Objective 2: To explore the impact of children's theater on children's creative abilities.

Literature Review

The main characteristics of children's drama

Children's drama is an important branch of drama, mainly targeting children aged 3 to 12, and is a form of stage art that allows children to watch or participate in performances (Celume et al., 2019). It uses elements such as language, body language, and facial expressions to express and perform, with simple and easy-to-understand plots and lively atmosphere, and with strong interactivity. According to Celume et al. (2020), in order to conduct aesthetic education for children and cultivate their aesthetics, the performance of children's drama has a certain educational purpose, which can help children enhance their knowledge reserves and establish a sound worldview and values, laying an important foundation for their future development. Generally speaking, children's drama has the following distinctive characteristics:

1. Narrative: Children's drama is a thematic activity presented by children in a contextualized way under the professional guidance of teachers (Edward, 2019). It is well known that strong curiosity, imitation habits, and a preference for imagination are typical characteristics of children aged 3 to 12. Storytelling is the "heart" of drama, and the fictional fairy tale plot of

children's drama has a strong appeal and potential sensory stimulation that conforms to the characteristics of children's psychological development and education laws. It also aligns well with children's love of fantasy and imagination, which can effectively stimulate children's interest in learning and self-awareness.

- 2. Playfulness: From the perspective of drama art, the script, actors, and audience are important elements of children's drama. Therefore, the interpretation and portrayal of the plot in children's drama requires the active participation and practical experience of human subjects. Actors need to vividly interpret the expressions, language, movements, and postures of the characters using props. The interaction between actors and the characters in the script is a form of interactive gameplay, which is a highly organized, purposeful, and planned game under specific conditions and training (Howard, 2022). Games are basic activities in kindergarten and can cultivate children's ability to imitate and create game roles. "Children's drama" fully meets the developmental characteristics of preschool children and is highly compatible with their natural temperament, providing more free play and creative space for children.
- 3. Artistry: In addition to the script, actors, and audience, factors such as music composition and stage art are also crucial to the success of an excellent children's drama. The artistry of children's drama lies in its ability to appeal to human emotions in a specific form and stimulate critical thinking (Corsaro, 2020). To achieve a perfect interpretation and portrayal, children's drama cannot do without stage art settings, which include props, colors, and lighting, among other artistic components. On stage, a specific story is presented through performance, creating a unique artistic atmosphere. This artistic atmosphere can enable children to appreciate the story from an artistic perspective and cultivate their aesthetic sense and performance skills through participation.
- 4. Educational value: Children's drama incorporates diverse elements, including the theme formulation, character dialogue, compact plot, and conveyed ideas. It's simple and clear themes, simple and sincere dialogues, and lively and interesting plots fully align with the age and physical and mental development characteristics of children (Celume et al., 2019). Children's drama emphasizes "acting" and emphasizes the cooperation among teams. The stage scene layout also changes flexibly with the development of the plot, displaying different beauty in the process. In the portrayal of the plot, children's emotions will also change according to the character settings and the development of the story, and the true, good, and beautiful elements it contains have significant educational value for children.

The important impact of children's drama on cognitive development in children

Curiosity, questioning, and exploration are innate traits of children. In child education, it is a primary task to stimulate and cultivate children's curiosity, cognitive interests, and exploration desires. The constructivist theory of Berger and Luckmann (1967) suggests that children should actively construct their own cognitive worlds, which means that educators need to create environments and conditions conducive to children's exploration and learning. Positive interaction among peers is beneficial for them to co-construct knowledge and understanding. Similar cognitive abilities and experiential backgrounds provide them with a common language and understanding, which builds a platform conducive to cognitive development. Therefore, educators should create opportunities for children to learn, explore, and grow with their peers.

Drama education is a suitable educational method for children. In drama education, children play roles and perform scenes to develop their cognitive and language abilities by imitating and expressing their thoughts and emotions (Beadle-Brown et al., 2018). The roles and themes in children's drama are clear, the dialogues are direct, and the language is simple and easy to understand, making it easier for children to comprehend and master. Through drama performance, children can develop their expression ability, social skills, and confidence (Edward, 2019). Children's drama education can also help them acquire domain knowledge. The content in the script can cover knowledge in various domains, such as history, culture, and science. Through participation in performance and creation, children can gain a deeper understanding of this knowledge, increasing their perspectives and insights (Celume et al., 2019). Children's drama education is a beneficial educational method that can help children develop cognitive, language, and social skills, while also stimulating their curiosity, cognitive interests, and exploration desires (Bland, 2015).

In summary, children's drama education is an educational method with extensive practical value. Educators should fully leverage its advantages, guide children to actively participate in learning and exploration, and help them develop comprehensively. At the same time, educators should continue to summarize experience and explore innovation to play a greater role in children's education.

Contributes to the development of cognitive and psychological functions in children

The development of cognitive and psychological functions is crucial for the growth and development of children. These functions include perception, attention, and memory, and play a

vital role in early childhood experiences according to Piaget's (1952) theory of cognitive development. Preschool children are in the preoperational stage, where they gradually begin to use mental representations to understand the world and develop their thinking abilities. Additionally, Piaget's (1971) theory of animism suggests that children view all objects around them as having life and cognitive and thinking abilities. Therefore, role-playing can showcase a child's animism and is one of the important contributions of drama education to a child's cognitive development.

Perception, attention, and memory in children are in their early stages of development and not yet fully stable. Wood et al.'s (1976) scaffolding theory suggests that early childhood educators should provide children with support within their zone of proximal development. In drama education, teachers can help children gradually develop the correct role awareness and social awareness, providing support and assistance for their growth and development.

Children's drama has clear themes, simple content, rich life interest, and beautiful stage art, allowing children to showcase their animism (Lee, 2016). In the script, the character's design is presented multiple times, and during the performance, children are continually interpreting, understanding, and shaping each aspect of the character, strengthening and enhancing their attention and memory. Meanwhile, the character relationships and plot developments in the play are a chain reaction with a strong logical connection, which can train children's thinking ability. Children's drama is also beneficial for promoting their language and communication skills (Bautista et al., 2018). In role-playing, children need to use language to express the character's emotions, thoughts, and actions, while also listening to other actors' words and reactions to interact and collaborate with others. Through such communication and interaction, children can improve their language expression and comprehension and strengthen their communication skills with others (Gibson & Ewing, 2020). Children need to play different roles, experience different emotions and feelings, and interact and cooperate with other actors, which can help them better understand and feel the emotions and needs of others. Through such experiences and interactions, children can enhance their emotional and social cognitive abilities, improve their empathy and cooperation skills (Schellenberg et al., 2015).

Therefore, this article proposes the following hypothesis:

H1: Children's drama can significantly improve children's cognitive abilities.

Effective in promoting the development of children's cognitive and innovative abilities

Children's drama is a creative and interactive activity that can help children develop comprehensively (Fleming, 2017). In children's drama performances, children need to play different roles, depict the story plot through emotional expressions and body language, among other ways (Siegel & Bryson, 2016). This requires children to fully utilize their imagination and creativity, to imagine themselves as the characters, and to shape their images and personalities. During this process, children's imagination and creativity will be effectively exercised, thereby enhancing their cognitive and innovative abilities.

In children's drama performances, children need to express themselves through oral and body language, using sound, facial expressions, gestures, etc., to convey their emotions and thoughts. This helps children improve their communication skills, making them more confident in expressing their viewpoints and feelings. This expressive ability is not only important for children's daily communication and expression but also helps them turn their creativity into action, thereby enhancing their cognitive and innovative abilities (Emunah, 2015). Children's drama is a group activity, and children need to cooperate with each other during the performance, playing different roles and expressing emotions. In this process, children need to coordinate and support each other, which helps children develop teamwork skills and learn to collaborate with others to accomplish tasks. This teamwork ability is not only useful in children's drama but also essential for their daily life and learning (Rowe, 2017).

Children's drama requires children to memorize lines and actions during the performance, as well as to maintain concentration. This helps children improve their attention and memory, enhancing their learning ability (Goldman, 2020). Children's drama requires children to depict the story plot through role-playing and emotional expressions, which can help children learn to recognize and understand their emotions, control and express them, thereby improving their emotional cognitive abilities (Lee, 2016). Children's drama often has diversity and complexity in the story plot and character settings, which can help children learn to think critically and analyze problems, thereby enhancing their critical thinking abilities. Children's drama requires children to express themselves through body language, which can help children improve their body coordination, increase their body control abilities, and build self-confidence.

Research has shown that children's drama can promote children's creativity development. American experts in creative thinking education, Goldstein et al. (2017), conducted comparative studies on children who participated in drama education. The results showed that children who received drama education had higher levels of overall creativity, situational creativity, textual creativity, and other aspects than children who did not receive drama education. Similarly, a study on primary school students showed that children's drama can significantly improve children's creativity levels, including imagination, originality, sensitivity, and expressive ability (Laidlaw & Wong, 2016).

Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed in this article:

H2: Children's drama can significantly enhance children's innovative ability.

Conceptual Framework

The main focus of this study is to explore the impact of children's drama on their cognitive abilities and creativity. The research framework is designed as shown in Figure 1.

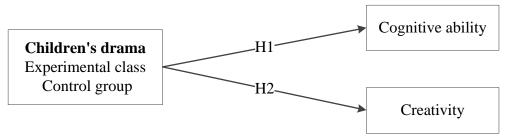


Figure 1. Research Model

This study employs a pretest-posttest design using a quasi-experimental research method. The experimental design is based on the relevant literature on children's drama in recent years. Due to limitations in teacher availability and research time, two existing classes were selected using convenience sampling and assigned to the experimental and control groups. Both groups received the same amount of teaching time with the same teacher, but the experimental group received 8 weeks of training in children's comedy drama while the control group received no intervention. Prior to and following the intervention, all students completed a series of cognitive ability and creativity tests.

The teaching period for both groups ran from February 6th, 2023 to March 26th, 2023, with each week consisting of two hours of instruction. Both groups were tested with a pretest and posttest, and the data obtained from cognitive ability and creativity tests administered before and after the experiment were analyzed and compared to explore the impact of children's comedy drama on students' cognitive abilities and creativity. The research process is illustrated in Figure 2.

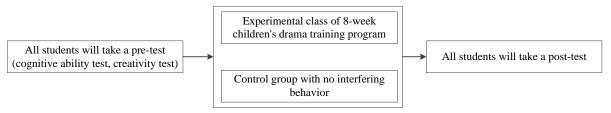


Figure 2. Study Flowchart

Research Methodology

Participants

This study recruited two primary school classes with a total of 60 participants (30 in the experimental group and 30 in the control group). The age range of the participants was between 8 and 10 years old.

Procedure

The children's comedy drama training was conducted twice a week for 8 weeks, including improvisation, role-playing, and other interactive activities. The aim of the training was to enhance children's creativity, communication, and cognitive abilities.

The cognitive ability test included a series of math, logic, and memory tests, while the creativity test included a series of drawing and writing tasks. All tests were conducted in a quiet and comfortable classroom environment.

Research Tools

The creativity scale adopted O'Connor's (2012) children's creativity scale, which includes 5 dimensions: innovativeness, the uniqueness of an individual in their thinking, actions, or performance; associative ability, the ability of an individual to use metaphors, analogies, or comparisons in various problems or tasks; primitive thinking ability, the ability of an individual to discover and define problems and develop solutions; value, the judgment and evaluation of an individual on the value or quality of what they or others have created; and extended awareness, the ability of an individual to be aware of and control their own consciousness and cognitive state. The higher the score on this scale, the stronger the creativity.

The cognitive ability scale adopted Wechsler's (1949) Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children (WISC), a standardized testing tool widely used to measure the intelligence and cognitive abilities of children aged 6 to 16. The WISC measures the child's intelligence quotient, processing speed, and working memory, among other factors. The test includes 15 subtests, including:

language ability, testing the child's vocabulary, comprehension, and language expression ability; reasoning ability, testing the child's reasoning, logical, and abstract thinking ability; spatial ability, testing the child's three-dimensional spatial imagination ability and spatial relationship processing ability; processing speed, testing the child's simple attention and mental processing speed. The higher the score on this scale, the stronger the child's cognitive ability.

Results

The data was analyzed using SPSS version 26. Descriptive and inferential statistics were employed to analyze the data. Independent sample t-tests were used to compare the scores of the experimental and control groups on measures of cognitive ability and creativity. The significance level was set at 0.05.

Analysis of Pre-test Data: On February 6, 2023, data was collected from students in the two classes, and independent sample t-tests were used for analysis. As shown in Table 1, there was no significant difference in cognitive ability test scores between the experimental class (M=77.78, SD = 6.71) and the control class (M=76.24, SD = 5.75), $t_{(58)}=1.027$, p>0.05. Similarly, there was no significant difference in creativity test scores between the experimental class (M=65.70, SD = 6.68) and the control class (M=66.09, SD = 6.33), $t_{(58)}=-0.859$, p>0.05. These findings indicate that there was no significant difference in cognitive ability and creativity between the students in the two classes selected for this study.

Table 1. Summary of Independent Samples t-test Before Experiment

	Experimental Class	Control Class			
	M±SD	M±SD	df	t	р
Cognitive Ability	77.78±6.71	76.24±5.75	58	1.027	0.309
Creativity	65.70±6.68	66.09±6.33	58	-0.859	0.398

On the post-test analysis, data was collected from both classes of students on March 26, 2023, and an independent samples t-test was used. In terms of cognitive ability test. As shown in Table 2, the experimental class had a significantly higher mean score (M = 85.2, SD = 7.6) than the control class (M = 78.6, SD = 6.4), $t_{(58)} = 5.23$, p < 0.05. In terms of creativity test, the experimental class had a significantly higher mean score (M = 72.4, SD = 5.8) than the control class (M = 66.8, SD = 4.9), $t_{(58)} = 4.12$, p < 0.05. This indicates that after eight weeks of

children's comedy drama training, students in the experimental class showed significant improvements in cognitive ability and creativity, while the control class did not show significant improvement.

Table 2. Summary of Independent Samples t-test After Experiment

	Experimental Class	Control Class			
	M±SD	M±SD	df	t	р
Cognitive Ability	85.27±7.66	78.61±5.89	58	5.237	0.000
Creativity	72.45±5.85	66.88±4.91	58	4.121	0.000

As shown in Figure 3, the statistical analysis above reveals that there were no significant differences between the experimental and control groups in the pretest. However, after 8 weeks of children's drama training, significant differences were observed in both cognitive ability and creativity for the experimental group. The experimental group showed an average increase of 7.49 points in cognitive ability and 6.75 points in creativity. On the other hand, the control group, which did not undergo the 8-week children's drama training, only showed a modest increase of 2.37 points in cognitive ability and 0.79 points in creativity. This could be attributed to the normal learning progress of the control group over the 8-week period, leading to some improvement in both cognitive ability and creativity, although the increase in scores was not statistically significant.

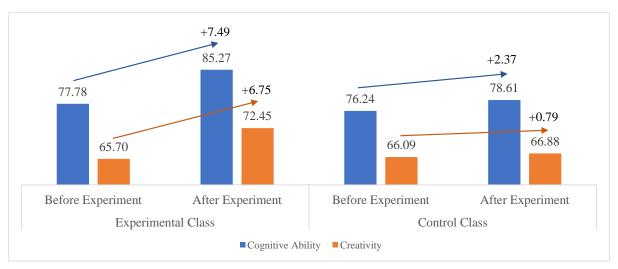


Figure 3. Summary of Experimental Results

Discussion

The results of this study provide valuable insights into the positive effects of children's comedy drama training on cognitive ability and creativity. The significant improvement observed in the experimental group suggests that children's drama training can be regarded as an effective tool for enhancing these aspects of children's development and education.

One possible explanation for the observed improvements is that children's drama training creates a stimulating and interactive environment that fosters creative and critical thinking (Lee, 2016). By engaging in dramatic exercises that require imagination, children are likely to enhance their cognitive skills and problem-solving abilities (Schellenberg et al., 2015). Additionally, the social aspects of drama training, such as improvisation and role-playing, contribute to the development of communication skills and teamwork (Fleming, 2017; Goldman, 2020), which are known to positively influence cognitive abilities and creativity.

While this study provides valuable insights, it is important to acknowledge its limitations. The small sample size and the lack of long-term follow-up limit the generalizability of the findings. Future research should aim to address these limitations by recruiting larger and more diverse participant groups and conducting longitudinal studies to evaluate the long-term effects of children's drama training on cognitive ability and creativity. In conclusion, this study highlights the potential of children's drama training to enhance cognitive ability and creativity. The interactive and imaginative nature of drama exercises, coupled with the social aspects of collaboration and communication, contribute to the observed improvements. Nonetheless, further research is needed to strengthen these findings and explore the long-term impact of drama training on children's development and educational outcomes.

Knowledge from Research

Research on the impact of children's drama training on cognitive abilities and creativity revealed positive effects. A quasi-experimental study with 60 participants aged 8–10 employed pretest-posttest design. The experimental group received 8 weeks of comedy drama training, while the control group received no intervention. Results indicated no significant differences between groups in pretest scores. However, after the intervention, the experimental group showed significantly higher scores in cognitive abilities and creativity compared to the control group. Drama training created a stimulating and interactive environment fostering critical thinking, problem-solving, communication, and teamwork. The study highlights the potential of drama

training in enhancing cognitive abilities and creativity in children. Further research is needed to address limitations and explore long-term effects. Incorporating drama training in education and home environments can promote children's overall development and improve learning outcomes.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study provides evidence that children's drama training can enhance their cognitive abilities and creativity. These findings suggest that children's drama training can be considered an effective tool in children's education and should be promoted in schools and homes. These results offer educators and parents a new teaching method aimed at promoting children's overall development and improving their learning outcomes. Moreover, these results provide a foundation for future research to explore the impact of children's drama training on other aspects, such as emotional intelligence and social skills.

In practice, educators can incorporate children's drama training, such as role-playing and improvisation, into their lesson plans to enhance students' cognitive abilities and creativity. Similarly, parents can encourage their children to practice these skills by organizing family theater or enrolling them in children's drama courses.

In summary, children's drama training is a promising educational tool that can enhance children's cognitive abilities and creativity. In the future, it should be more widely promoted and applied in both educational and home environments.

Suggestion

Suggestions for Utilization of Research Results: Organize professional development workshops for educators to enhance their understanding of children's drama education and provide practical strategies for implementation. Incorporate drama-based activities into the existing curriculum to foster creativity, social interaction, and critical thinking. Collaborate with drama practitioners or theater groups to facilitate joint projects and workshops for educators and children. Conduct parent workshops to educate them about the benefits of drama education and encourage support at home. Establish drama clubs or groups within schools to provide additional opportunities for children to develop their drama skills.

Suggestions for the Next Research: Conduct a long-term impact study to examine the effects of drama education on cognitive, emotional, and social development. Compare the effectiveness of different drama teaching approaches to identify the most effective strategies for

promoting autonomy and creativity. Investigate the role of drama education in promoting inclusive practices within the classroom. Research effective training and support systems for teachers implementing drama education. Explore the influence of cultural factors on children's engagement with drama education.

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