

## THE EFFECTS OF CHILDREN'S DRAMA ON THE LANGUAGE SKILLS OF 4-5-YEAR-OLDS

Yu Miao<sup>1</sup>, Fadzilah Abd Rahman<sup>2\*</sup>, and Xu Ke<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1,2</sup> Faculty of Education and Liberal Studies, City University Malaysia, 46100 Petaling Jaya, Selangor, Malaysia.

<sup>1,3</sup> Department of Early Education, Sichuan Pre-school Educators College, 621000 MianYang, Si Chuan, China.

**ABSTRACT** – Early childhood is an important period for the development and promotion of children's language ability, special attention should be paid to the cultivation of children's language ability. The role dialogue and story plot in the story of fairy tales contain lots of language components in this study and is one of the children's favorite form of activities. In many studies in the literature for preschool children (Mages, 2008; Can- Yaşar, 2009; Laurin, 2010; Ceylan & Ömeroğlu, 2012; Kaya, Günay & Aydın, 2016), all emphasize drama education as an important element of their learning and development. Based on the age characteristics of 4-5year old and two dimensions of children's language ability (listening and expression, reading and narration), four children drama education activities were designed and quasi-experimented in the experimental class. The following conclusions are obtained after the experiment: 1. The children's drama is suitable for promoting the development of 4–5-year-old children's language ability. 2. The children's drama promotes the language ability of 4-5 years old children.

### ARTICLE HISTORY

Received: 01/10/2023

Revised: 20/11/2023

Accepted: 01/12/2023

### KEYWORDS

*Children Drama*

*Children's Language*

*Ability*

*4-5 Years Old Children*

## INTRODUCTION

From a general subject area to a particular field of research. From a very early age, young children enjoy drama. Drama has an important value in early childhood development. Drama helps young children to develop their natural instincts. Drama is an effective technique at this point (Kaya et al., 2016). It is essential for preschool children to enjoy drama activities (Adıgüzel, 2006). According to previous research results, the role of early childhood drama in the development of young children the role of early childhood drama in early childhood development is mainly reflected in three aspects: early childhood drama promotes the cognitive development of young children, fairy tales promote the emotional development of young children, and early childhood drama promotes social development of young children. The role of early childhood drama in early childhood development is mainly reflected in three aspects: Early childhood drama promotes the cognitive development of children, fairy tales promote the emotional development of children, and early childhood drama promotes the social development of children. It can be concluded that early childhood drama. As an important activity of drama education, it plays a vital role in promoting the development of young children's multiple abilities. It is clear from this that drama for young children, as an important activity in drama education, plays a vital role in promoting the development of young children's multiple abilities. Basically, all kindergartens have drama performances for young children, but the status of drama education in kindergartens is mixed. In recent years, despite the gradual rise in the status of early childhood drama in kindergarten education, the actual implementation is less than ideal. From the selection of drama themes for young children to the design of drama, teachers' guidance and evaluation of children's drama performances, there are some problems.

## PROBLEM STATEMENT

This study focuses on demonstrating the difference in children's language proficiency levels before and after the experiment through experimental data, providing an empirical basis for participation in fairy tale performances in parents' kindergartens, demonstrating that parent-involved children's drama can have an impact on children's language proficiency enhancement, and analysing where the differences in children's language proficiency specifically manifest. According to the purpose of the study, the research questions can be broken down into the following questions that need to be specifically addressed:

**RQ1**

H1null : There was no significant effect on preschool children's language ability between the control and experimental groups.

H1alt : There was a significant effect on preschool children's language ability between the control and experimental groups.

**RQ2**

H2null : Participation in children's play promotes children's language skills.

H2alt : Participation in children's play does not promote children's language skills.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **An Overview of Literature Review**

With drama activities, children develop their imagination and creativity by using real objects with symbolic meanings and learn information about concepts through drama in a short time and permanently. Children one more time encounter casual problems presented to them in different ways during drama activities. Thus, their problem-solving skills are supported, and they can develop different perspectives on events (Kandir, 2010). While children learn by playing and living, their cognitive development improves. Because imagination is a child's most required material in playing. Mental processes are required to imagine seeing, hearing, feeling, touching, tasting or smelling things that do not exist. In this process, children are invited to see beyond what is offered and explore new experiences and different situations (Karadağ &Çalışkan, 2005). Thus, the children learn a lot of new and different information in the process of dramatic activities and drama. They reach this information by observing the experiences of their friends or by trying different experiences. During the drama process, children compare information that forms the basis of their reasoning skills with the acquired new knowledge and make inferences on their similarities and differences. What is more, children can review their former information to solve a problem faced in drama activities, associate events and situations with each other and examine the causes of events and their consequences (Yayla-Ceylan, 2011). Thanks to the opportunities of drama activities, children's cognitive accumulation of knowledge to provide their physical and social adaptation to the environment has reached a much higher level. It helps children obtain information about themselves and notice what they can and cannot do in a more realistic way (Önder, 2010). Therefore, the importance of drama-based activities is great for pre-school children's learning acquisitions and concepts in cognitive outcomes. Young children are actively and creatively able to express their unique understanding and feelings about fairy tales through children's drama, which is a very popular way for young children. In the process, they experience the joy of performing; in success and happiness, they see their own essence and intrinsic value and enhance their own diverse expressive power (Gu Hui,2014).

### **Analytical Features of a Literature Review**

At present, there are relatively few studies on children's drama education. Even if relevant studies are done, scholars mainly focus on several aspects, such as the creation of an environment for children's drama performance, guidance strategies and their effects on young children. The research is theoretically oriented, with little empirical research and little relevance. First, there is a lack of activity specificity. The guidance methods proposed by researchers about children's drama are more general and principled methods, which are also suitable for other activities and cannot address the specific and detailed characteristics of fairy tale performance activities. Second, there is a lack of age specificity. The level of language skills of young children is influenced by the characteristics of growth and development at different ages, and each age has different stage characteristics. The researchers' proposed methods, which can be applied to a larger range of kindergarten classes of all ages, do not provide specific guidance for the different developmental characteristics of children at different ages.

There are many studies on language education for children conducted in kindergartens, but not many studies on the impact of kindergarten drama education on children's language. Influenced by teachers' psychology, resource characteristics and cost of use, kindergartens often use few educational tools in drama education activities, and some effective educational tools, such as drama education,

cannot be applied in early childhood education due to the lack of reliable ways and methods. For example, some kindergarten teachers do not know how to use children's drama education to purposefully improve children's language skills, parents question the educational approach and in kindergarten children's drama education, and some teachers themselves doubt that children's drama has an enhancing effect on children's language skills, all of which are research gaps and deserve to be studied.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Research Design**

Quasi-experimental designs are typically necessary when conducting studies involving school children because researchers must often agree to maintain the structure of existing classrooms. Kindergarten A and Kindergarten B, where children's drama education was not conducted, were selected as experimental schools, and two parallel middle classes were selected as two experimental classes and two control classes, respectively. The total number of students was 116. The quasi-experimental method was used. Before the experiment, the language ability of the children in the four middle classes of the two kindergartens was mapped.

The test was conducted before the experiment. At the end of the experiment, post-tests were administered to the four classes in the two kindergartens. The children's language proficiency levels were measured before and after the experiment and analysed to test the hypotheses and draw conclusions. The same instrument was used for both the pre-test and post-test, namely the 4–5-year-old language proficiency test.

### **Population and Sampling**

The researcher took 60 children from kindergartens A and B for the pretest and tested the reliability by SPSS. Kindergarten A and Kindergarten B were selected as experimental schools, and two parallel middle classes were selected as two experimental classes and two control classes, respectively. There were two experimental classes with a total of 58 students and two control classes with a total of 58 students, all with a total of 116 students, and the teachers in each class were approximately the same in terms of teaching level.

### **Data Collection**

"The 4-5 Years Old Children's Language Proficiency Level Test " consists of a set of test questions and a tally sheet. The test content is a fairy tale. Listen to the story and answer the questions. The story is as follows: "One day, Miao Miao was walking on the road with an umbrella. Suddenly, a big wind blew over and blew Miao Miao up into the sky. Miao Miao floated up in the sky with her umbrella, and as she floated, she saw a piece of green grass on the ground with some children playing soccer. As Miao Miao continued to fly in the sky, a goose flew by her, and Miao Miao waved hello to it. After a while, Miao Miao flew to the roof of a house, and her mother saw her in the yard. When Miao Miao saw her mother, she jumped down from the roof. The mother caught her as soon as she could." According to the story, answer 8 questions: 1. What was Miao Miao doing? 2. How did Miao Miao fly? 3. What did Miao Miao see when she was flying in the sky? And other questions. There were eight questions. Included is also a picture-telling story in which children tell a story based on pictures. The tally sheet, using a point system, is a face-to-face data collection, where complete accuracy is 5 points, basic accuracy is 3 points, and incorrect or no answer is 1 point. The tally sheet was divided into 2 parts: listening to the story and, answering the questions, and telling the story according to the picture.

### **Measurement/Trustworthiness**

The reliability of the "4-5-year-old language test" was analysed by using Cronbach's alpha coefficient (Cronbach's alpha was used as an indicator of the internal consistency of the items) , and the alpha coefficient of the test was 0.742. As shown in Table 1.

**Table 1. Reliability Statistics (Cronbach Alpha)**

Items	Corrected Item-Total Correlation (CITC) $\square$	Cronbach Alpha if Item Deleted $\square$	Cronbach $\alpha$ $\square$
Read & tell	0.804	-	0.743
Listening & expressing	0.901	-	

The alpha coefficient of the test was 0.742, which is within the acceptable range. The Spearman's correlation coefficient was calculated, and the rater's reliability was 0.868, indicating that the test was scored simultaneously by the researcher and another S teacher. The Spearman's correlation coefficient was calculated and yielded a rater reliability of 0.868, indicating high rater agreement. This indicates that the "4-5-year-old language proficiency test questions" have good overall internal reliability. The overall internal consistency and stability of the 4–5-year olds' language proficiency test is good.

During the course of the quasi-experiment, the control class followed regular education and did not take any educational measures related to children's drama. The experimental class remained the same as the control class except for two educational activities of children's drama per week, each lasting 25-30 minutes. The experiment was conducted over a period of one semester. After one semester of testing, the researcher and the teacher assisted in the second assessment of the language skills of the children in the experimental and control classes based on the "Language Proficiency Test for 4-5-Year-Olds" (see Appendix 1 and 2 for the test questions and assessment forms).

## RESULTS

A total of 112 kindergarten children were selected as the study sample, with 56 children selected from kindergarten A and 56 children from kindergarten B. The main objective was to test the effect of children's drama on children's language skills.

The pre-test was administered to two experimental classes and two control classes of children selected from kindergartens A and B. The results were recorded by the researcher and the teacher of the selected S children, and independent sample t-tests were conducted by SPSS. As shown in Table 2.

**Table 2. Independent T-Test**

	Classes (Mean $\pm$ Std. Deviation)		t $\square$	p $\square$
	Experimental class (n=58)	Control class (n=58)		
Read & tell	20.828 $\pm$ 2.728	20.655 $\pm$ 2.763	0.338	0.736
Listening & expressing	8.724 $\pm$ 1.565	8.655 $\pm$ 1.915	0.212	0.832

After conducting a semester-long educational experiment, two experimental classes and two control classes selected from A and B were post-tested with the Language Proficiency Test for 4–5-year-olds, and the test results were still recorded by the researcher and childcare teacher, and independent sample t-tests were conducted by SPSS, and the results are shown in Table 3.

**Table 3. Independent T Test**

	Classes (Mean $\pm$ Std. Deviation)		t $\bullet$	p $\bullet$
	Experimental class (n=58)	Control class (n=58)		
Read & tell	29.552 $\pm$ 3.724	29.310 $\pm$ 3.943	0.339	0.735
Listening & expressing	49.931 $\pm$ 7.410	34.345 $\pm$ 8.364	10.623***	0.000

Table 3 shows that before the experiment, the overall language proficiency level of the children in the experimental middle class and the control class did not differ significantly ( $p > 0.05$ ), and the children's language proficiency level was homogeneous. After conducting the experiment, the difference in the overall language ability level of the children in the experimental and control classes of the middle class was significant ( $p < 0.001$ ). The comparison of the differences before and after the experiment illustrates that the fairy tale performance activities promoted the development of language skills of 4–5-year-old children. The test instrument contained a picture story in which we asked the children questions about Form 4 and collected data for analysis. Before the experiment, the differences between the experimental and control classes were not significant ( $p > 0.05$ ) in the listening expression and reading and narration dimensions, which means that the experimental and control classes were considered to be at the same level of language ability. After one school year of the experiment, the differences between the experimental and control classes in the listening and expressing and reading and telling dimensions were extremely significant ( $p < 0.001$ ), meaning that the experimental middle-class children's language ability was significantly higher than that of the control class children. This indicates that after our educational experiment, the language ability of the children in the experimental middle class has been greatly improved.

**Table 4.** Specific analysis of the language skills of the children in the experimental and control classes in the middle class before and after the experiment in each dimension

Items		Experimental class (n=58)		Control class (n=58)		t	p
		MD	SD	MD	SD		
		One day, what was Lele doing?	Pre-experiment	2.621	1.268		
	Post-experiment	4.000	1.199	2.517	1.314	6.346	0.000
How did Lele fly?	Pre-experiment	2.828	0.775	2.828	0.939	0.000	1.000
	Post-experiment	4.172	1.126	3.379	1.089	3.855	0.000
Why can Lele fly in the sky?	Pre-experiment	1.724	0.970	1.828	0.944	-0.567	0.562
	Post-experiment	2.966	1.611	1.690	1.217	4.813	0.000
What did Joy see when she was flying in the sky?	Pre-experiment	2.655	1.001	2.483	1.030	0.914	0.363
	Post-experiment	3.862	1.249	3.138	0.907	3.573	0.001
Where did Lele jump to?	Pre-experiment	2.138	1.131	2.241	0.979	-0.527	0.599
	Post-experiment	3.828	1.403	2.552	1.404	4.895	0.000

As can be seen from Table 4, the language skills of the children in the experimental and control classes in the pre-experimental middle class, in the listening and expression and reading and telling dimensions, The differences between the pre-experimental and control classes in listening and expressing, reading and telling are not significant ( $p > 0.05$ ). The children in the pre-experimental class and the control class answered each question at the same level; after the experiment, the children in the middle class and the control class answered each question at the same level. The differences between the experimental class and the control class in the listening and expression, reading and narration dimensions were extremely significant.

The results showed that the differences between the experimental and control classes in the listening and expression and reading and narration dimensions were not significant ( $p > 0.05$ ) and were homogeneous. We can see from the t-value that the experimental class children's performance is slightly better than the control class children's performance in the two dimensions of children's language ability, but considering that the difference between the experimental class children's language ability level and the control class children's language ability level will become larger after the implementation of the intervention factor of fairy tale drama activity, that is, the experimental class children's language ability level will be much higher than the control class, which will not affect the accuracy of the experimental results.

The accuracy of the experimental results will not be affected. Based on this hypothesis, this study did not break the natural class in which the children were placed for readjustment before the experiment was conducted. The results of the experiment (see Tables 3 and 4) showed that after one

semester of the experiment, the results of the post-test between the experimental and control classes were extremely significant ( $p < 0.001$ ). The difference between the children in the experimental and control classes ranged from insignificant to highly significant in terms of language ability. It is evident that fairy tale educational activities promoted the development of language skills in 4–5-year-olds.

## **DISCUSSION**

The existing studies only suggest that there may be an effect of children's drama on children's language ability. After the experiment, we confirmed that children's drama has an effect on children's language skills. The quasi-experimental study revealed the way in which children's drama affected children's language skills and proved that children's language skills could be improved in a relatively short period of time, such as one semester (four months), after the systematic educational practice of children's drama. Through the study, we found that children's drama mainly has an enhancing effect on children's listening and expression skills and reading and presentation skills. The same children's ability to read pictures and talk was improved by the children's theatre education, and the children were more accurate in their expression of the pictures, more careful in their observations, bolder in their expressions in front of others, and more fluent in their communication. Children's language skills are enhanced by children's drama, which enriches the way kindergarten language teaching activities are conducted and helps teachers accomplish their goals more easily in kindergarten teaching activities. The role of children's drama education in enhancing children's language skills, the relaxed language environment and flexible teaching methods of children's drama education have the potential to help children with language expression disorders and children with autism improve their language expression skills. This could expand the scope of research on the effects of children's drama education on children's language skills from general children to special children.

## **CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS**

The researcher conducted an experiment on fairy tale performance in two kindergartens, A and B, for one school year and obtained.

The following conclusions were drawn Children's plays are suitable for promoting the development of language skills of 4-5-year-olds. Through the processing of data before and after the experiment and the feedback from children, teachers of children and parents of children, we can see the changes in children's language skills before and after the experiment, which indicates that children's plays are suitable for promoting the development of language skills of 4-5-year-olds. Children's plays can promote the level of language ability of 4–5-year-olds. Before and after the experiment, the difference in the overall language proficiency levels of the children in the experimental and control classes in the middle class ranged from non-significant to extremely significant, indicating that children's plays can promote the language proficiency levels of 4–5-year-olds.

## **DATA AVAILABILITY DECLARATION**

The original contributions encompassed within this study are comprehensively documented in the article and accompanying supplementary materials. Should additional inquiries or data-related requests arise, kindly direct them to the attention of the corresponding author.

## **FUNDING**

This research endeavour did not receive financial support or grants from any external funding sources.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

We sincerely thank our supervisor, Fadzilah Binti Abd Rahman, and our colleagues, Xu Ke, for their guidance and support. We also appreciate the assistance provided by City University. Special thanks go to our family and friends for their encouragement throughout this process.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors herein assert that the research undertaken was executed without the influence of any commercial or financial affiliations, which may be perceived as potential conflicts of interest.

## PUBLISHER'S NOTE

All assertions articulated in this article are exclusively attributable to the authors and may not necessarily reflect the views of their associated institutions, the publisher, the editors, or the reviewers. The evaluation of any product within this article or any claims made by its manufacturer does not entail a guarantee or endorsement on the part of the publisher.

## REFERENCES

- Brynjulf -Hjertø, K., Merok Paulsen, J., & Petteri Tihveräinen, S. (2014). Social cognitive outcomes of teachers' engagement in learning communities. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 52(6), 775-791.
- Burgess, J., Robertson, G., & Patterson, C. (2010). Curriculum implementation: Decisions of early childhood teachers. *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood*, 35(3), 51-59.
- Corriveau, K., Goswami, U., & Thomson, J. (2010). Auditory processing and early literacy skills in a preschool and kindergarten population. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 43(4), 369-382.
- DeBruin-Parecki, A., & Slutzky, C. (2016). Exploring pre-K age 4 learning standards and their role in early childhood education: Research and policy implications. *ETS Research Report Series*, 2016(1), 1-52.
- Dennis, L. R., & Votteler, N. K. (2013). Preschool teachers and children's emergent writing: Supporting diverse learners. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 41(6), 439-446.
- Gardner-Neblett, N., & Iruka, I. (2015). Oral narrative skills: Explaining the language emergent literacy link by race/ethnicity and SES. *Developmental Psychology*, 51(7), 889-889.
- Gronlund, G., & Handrigan, J. (2014). *Make early learning standards come alive: Connecting your practice and curriculum to state guidelines* (Second edition. ed.). St. Paul, Minnesota.
- Halcomb, E., & Hickman, L. (2015). Mixed methods research. *Nursing Standard (2014)*, 29(32), 41-41
- Kim, S., Im, H., & Kwon, K. (2015). The role of home literacy environment in toddlerhood in development of vocabulary and decoding skills. *Child & Youth Care Forum: Journal of Research and Practice in Children's Services*, 44(6), 835-852.
- King, K. A. (2012). Writing workshop in preschool. *The Reading Teacher*, 65(6), 392.
- Mills, G. E., & Gay, L. R. (2016). *Educational research: competencies for analysis and applications* (11th ed.). New York, NY: Pearson.
- Pinnell, G., & Fountas, I. (2011). *The continuum of literacy learning, grades prek-8: A guide to teaching* (2nd ed.). Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Preschool programs-with literacy component-can narrow gaps. (2006, June 22). *Report on Literacy Programs*, 18(11), p. 85.
- Quinn, M. F., Gerde, H. K., & Bingham, G. E. (2016). Help me where I am: Scaffolding writing in preschool classrooms. *The Reading Teacher*, 70(3), 353-357.
- Yoshikawa, H., Weiland, C., & Brooks-Gunn, J. (2016). When does pre-school matter? *Future of Children*, 26(2), 21.

## APPENDICES

### Appendix A: Language proficiency test questions for 4–5-year-olds



"One day, Lele was walking on the road with an umbrella. Suddenly, a big wind blew over and blew Lele up into the sky. Lele floated up in the sky with her umbrella, and as she floated, she saw a piece of green grass on the ground, on which some children were playing football. As Lele continued to fly in the sky, a goose flew by her, and Lele waved to it to say hello. After a while, Lele flew to the roof of a house, and her mother saw her in the yard. When Lele saw her mother, she jumped off the roof. Mom picked her up as soon as she could."

Question (5 points for "completely accurate", 3 points for "basically accurate", and 1 point for "inaccurate or inaccurate") :

- 1、 One day, what was Lele doing ?
- 2、 How did Lele fly?
- 3、 Why can Lele fly in the sky?
- 4、 What did Joy see when she was flying in the sky?
- 5、 Where did Lele jump to?