

THE EFFECT OF CHILDREN'S DRAMA-THEMED ACTIVITIES ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF SPEAKING SKILLS IN 4-5-YEAR-OLD

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ABSTRACT- Early childhood is a critical period for language learning and young children's ability to use language is mainly reflected in the process of telling. The development of young children's expressive abilities has an essential impact on their language ability and overall development. In this study, two parallel 4-5-year-olds were selected in Mianyang kindergarten, and the experimental class was randomly divided into the control class for a 10-week shared reading activity. After analysis, we concluded that children's drama-themed activities could promote the development of 4-5-year-old children's speaking ability; children's drama-themed activities can encourage the development of 4-5-year-old children in the four dimensions of "narrative length", "vocabulary level", "sentence structure" and "expressive ability"; and there is no significant difference between the genders in the effect of children's drama-themed activities on the expressive ability of 4-5-year-old children.

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INTRODUCTION

Children's ability to speak is an essential part of their language skills, and their demonstrated ability to communicate is an important indicator for assessing the language skills of young children". The development of expressive skills in early childhood has a profound impact on later language development. The Chinese Ministry of Education released the Learning and Development Guidelines for Children Aged 3-6 in July 2012, categorising children's language skills into three parts: listening, language comprehension and expression. Expressive skills, also called "listening and expression," were developed by the Ministry of Education (MOE) of the People's Republic of China. The MOE document requires children's expressive skills to be willing to speak and express themselves clearly. To achieve this goal, the MOE recommends encouraging children to play with their peers and be ready to express themselves clearly. It is also mentioned in the educational recommendations that the materials for educational activities can be storybooks and picture books. (Ministry of Education of China, 2012). Thematic activities are essential for educational activities in the language field in kindergarten, and children's theatre thematic activities are helpful for children's language development (Guevara, 2020). Children can communicate with their peers and exercise their language skills through children's drama-themed activities. Therefore, children's drama theme activities are a suitable means of language education with crucial educational value, and children's drama theme activities can enable young children to go beyond the initial form of language and promote the development of their language skills. With the emphasis on the cultivation of young children's social interaction ability, the cultivation of language expression ability has also been an important research topic in the cultivation of young children's language expression ability and outstanding storytelling ability.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

This study will provide a preliminary understanding of the status of the development of 4-5-year-old children's speaking ability; conduct children's drama theme activities in the experimental class to explore the effects of children's drama theme activities on the speaking ability of the experimental class; and explore and analyse suggestions to promote the development of 4-5-year-old children's speaking ability. This study randomly selected two parallel 4-5-year-olds from a sample of kindergartens in Mianyang City and divided them into experimental and control classes. This study randomly selected

two similar intermediate classes from a sample of kindergartens in Mianyang City and divided them into practical and control classes. The findings were analysed, and suggestions and countermeasures were made to explore strategies for developing young children's expressive skills.

Q1: To confirm whether children's drama theme activities influence the development of 4–5-year-old children's speaking ability.

Q2: To confirm whether there is a gender difference in the development of middle-class children's speaking ability through children's drama theme activities.

Ho1: Children's speaking ability development is the same between the experimental and control classes through children's drama theme activities.

Ho2: There is no gender difference in the development of children's speaking ability between the experimental and control classes through children's drama-themed activities.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature Review on Storybook Shared Reading and Children's Expressive Skills

In recent years, themed activities have become an essential educational activity in Chinese kindergartens. Many researchers are seriously studying thematic activities, among which children's drama-themed activities have also received attention. Kindergarten drama programs are more diverse and are divided into random drama-playing games for young children, thematic drama-playing activities, issue-based educational drama D-I-E, and linearly organised creative drama (Meijun Lin, 2015). The "kindergarten drama theme activity" is a "drama creation paradigm based on dramatic expression", which regards drama as one of the symbols of children's self-expression, and the drama theme activity is a kind of drama education activity jointly constructed by teachers and students, which has good universality in China. Organisational form helps to realise the complete construction of young children's drama experience (Zhang, Jinmei, 2014). The themes of drama-themed activities come from three sources: first, works of art (literature, music, art, drama, etc.); second, events—and third, ideas. The theme links the series of dramatic activities in a drama theme activity and connects children's dram-theatrical experiences and each other, thus creating a mutually supportive channel between dramatic expression, dramatic creation and dramatic performance (Zhang Jinmei, 2022). The construction of drama-themed activities is not centred on the script (story) but the children's drama experience. It is expressed in drama-themed activities that begin with dramatic expression, have a theatrical creation as the mainstay, and end with a theatrical performance (Zhu Qin, 2015). In the design of drama-themed activities, a drama-themed program includes a theme statement (background, sources), theme goals, area setting, parent work, resource allocation, activity schedule, and specific activity design (Chen Shouhong, 2019).

Analytical Features of a Literature Review

In terms of research content, scholars mainly focus on how children's drama theme activities promote the development of different abilities in practice, such as social development (including self-concept, emotional processing, social perspective, social skills, etc.), cognitive development (including cognitive thinking, creativity, value judgment, etc.). In terms of research methodology, most of the existing studies are based on empirical articles, with a single research methodology and participation as observers. Regarding research questions, most current studies focus on how to use theatre education to improve children's abilities. Still, we believe that the root cause of the differences in children's capabilities lies in the differences in children's learning styles and thinking styles. From the point of view of the research object, both at home and internationally, although several scholars, one after another, have paid more attention to the use of drama education activities (as well as drama thematic activities) in the specific teaching practice of kindergarten, most of them are empirical and discursive articles, and the practical research is relatively small. The area of concern is relatively narrow, and a systematic curriculum system needs to be formed. The reasons for this are mainly due to the following limitations: First, the conflict with the regular teaching activities of kindergartens: most of the

kindergartens selected by the researcher have their curriculum system, which can hardly fully satisfy the researcher's "extra" teaching activities. As a result, the researcher was subject to many limitations in organising and implementing the activities. Second, the limitations of the school and classroom environment: drama education activities cannot be carried out without the support of the environment, but most of the kindergartens have their environmental planning and arrangements, which makes it challenging to meet the needs of the research on drama theme activities for young children in terms of space and teacher cooperation. Finally, as drama education activities started late in China and received little attention, they are still in their infancy, and there needs to be more literature available for reference.

METHODOLOGY

In the study, two parallel 4–5-year-olds in a sample kindergarten in Mian Yang City were randomly selected and divided into experimental and control classes; a practical mental class was used to investigate whether storybook sharing and reading activities affected the development of children's expressive skills. The results were analysed, and suggestions and countermeasures were made to explore strategies for developing graphic talents.

Quasi-experimental

Educational experiments are conducted in the natural education and teaching environment because students live in a specific classroom and school environment. This specific social environment is necessary for the corresponding educational phenomena to appear. Therefore, educational experiments cannot be separated from academic teaching practice activities (Pei Tianna, 2000). This study conducted a 10-week educational experiment in two parallel intermediate classes in public kindergartens in Mian Yang City, where experimental and control classes were randomly selected. The researcher rationally controlled or created certain conditions according to the purpose of the study, which was to investigate whether children's theatre thematic activities impact the development of young children's speaking skills. The study was divided into four phases: the preparation phase, the test phase, the experimental intervention phase, the post-test phase, and finally, the data processing and analysis.

Population and Sampling

In the present study, two parallel intermediate classes of 27 boys and 29 girls aged 4-5 years were selected from a public kindergarten. All the children were randomly divided into experimental and control classes whose parents and teachers were willing to cooperate with the study. All 28 children in the periphrastrically participated in the

Moreover, the post-test and all 28 children in the control class participated in the pretest and post-test. According to the researchers, before this study, all subjects had little or no involvement in children's thematic activities and activities specifically designed to improve children's expressive skills.

Data Collection

To ensure the accuracy of data collection and make the data collection process smoother. The researcher will communicate with the sample kindergarten in advance. Since the kindergarten is public, the researcher will contact the head of the kindergarten's education bureau to obtain permission from the relevant department. After receiving getting from the governmental departments and support from the kindergartens, the researchers will spend two weeks familiarising themselves with the children, selecting the experimental subjects, preparing the experimental practical selecting and calibrating the measuring instruments, basic assessment of the children's expressive abilities will be conducted using the measuring materials, so all the experimental subjects will be pretested, and the experiments will be initiated after it is determined that there is no difference in the expressive abilities of the experimental subjects; in the exploratory testing experimental practical ten weeks (about two and a half months) of children's thematic activity activities three times a week for a total of 30 experimental interparticle control class receives no intervention; during the post-testing phase, children's expressive abilities are assessed again at post-testing, using the same test materials.

Test of Normality

The most essential step in conducting statistical analyses is ensuring the data are typically distributed. This step influences the decision to apply types of statistical analysis to the study data. Normality assumptions are made using several statistical techniques used to examine data, including correlation, regression, t-tests, and analysis of variance. The resulting meaning is only an accurate representation of the data if the data are typically distributed. A mistaken interpretation might result from choosing the wrong representative value for a data collection and then utilising that value to calculate the significance level. To determine whether the mean may be used as the data's representative value, the standardised nature of the data is thus first verified in this study.

In this study, two common tests, the standard ROV-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk's tests, were conducted to check the normality of the study data, both before and after the listening and speaking skills tests. The results of these two tests are presented in Table 1 below.

Table: Test of normality of total test scores in pretest experimental and control classes
(Kolmogorov-Smirnov)

Items	n	Mean	Std.	Skewness	kurtosis	Normality test			
						Kolmogorov-Smirnov test		Shapiro-Wilk test	
						Statistic D	p	Statistic W	p
Control Class	51	37.540	8.200	0.216	-0.331	0.067	0.825	0.986	0.823
Experimental Class	51	38.360	7.829	0.086	-0.120	0.089	0.415	0.988	0.875

Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk's normality tests revealed that all of the data from the experimental and control groups were normally distributed ($p > .05$), which justified the use of parametric statistics for further investigation.

RESULTS

When formulating the results section, it is essential to remember that the results of a study do not mean the researcher used SPSS data processing software to test the pretest scores of expressive skills of the children in the experimental and control classes. The test analysis aimed to determine whether there was a significant difference in the developmental level of children's expressive skills in the two classes. T-test for independent samples of pretest expressiveness in the experimental and control classes. As shown in Table 1.

Table 2. Pte-Experiment Experimental and Control Classes Saying Ability Independent T Test

	Classes (Mean±Std. Deviation)		t	p
	Experimental class (n=28)	Control class (n=28)		
Speaking skills	8.8926±0.95604	8.9286±1.33135	-0.115	0.909

As can be seen from the table above, the t-test value for the overall narrative ability of the children in the experimental and control classes in the pretest was -0.115, which corresponds to a significance p-value = 0.909 > 0.05 and thus is within the 95% confidence interval, indicating that there is no significant difference in the expressive ability of the children in the two classes in the pretest. To understand the effect of the intervention of the children's theatre thematic activity, a paired-sample t-test was conducted on the pretest and post-test scores of the children's narrative skills in the experimental class.

An independent samples t-test was conducted on the dimensions of children's expressiveness on the pretest between the experimental and control classes to see if there were any differences in the dimensions of expressiveness between the two groups.

Table 3. Independent t-test for pre- and post-test speaking ability in the experimental class

	Experimental Classes (Mean±Std. Deviation)		t	p
	Pretest (n=28)	Pro-test (n=28)		
Speaking skills	8.8286±1.43136	12.2786±1.97365	-6.456	0.000

As can be seen from the above table, the t-test value of the pretest and post-test of the narrative ability of the children in the experimental class is -6.456, corresponding to a significant p-value=0.000<0.001; the difference is substantial, which indicates that the children's drama theme activities have a significant effect on the expressive ability of the children in the 4-5-year-old.

At the end of the experiment, the language skills of the male and female children in the experimental class were analysed using SPSS 20.0, and the obtained results are as follows:

Table 4. Speaking ability of male and female children in the practical class after the experiment Independent T Test

	Experimental Classes (Mean±Std. Deviation)		t	p
	Male children(n=13)	Female children (n=15)		
Speaking skills	32.071 ±5.149	32.133±6.101	-0.042	0.967

After eight weeks of intervention, it can be seen from Table 4 that the difference between the speaking ability levels of boys and girls in the 4–5-year-old experimental class after the experiment is still not significant ($p>0.05$), and boys and girls continue to speak at the same level. Therefore, no critical relationship exists between language proficiency level and gender in the 4–5-year-old group.

DISCUSSION

The children's theatre theme activity intervention was implemented in the experimental and control classes for ten weeks (about two and a half months), and the children in the practical and control classes had the same level of development of expressive ability; the children in the experimental class significantly improved their narrative ability scores on the post-test, and the difference between the two dimensions was significant compared to the pretest. The children in the control class also improved on the post-test, but the difference was insignificant compared to the experimental class. Therefore, the children's drama theme activity has a positive effect on the development of expression ability of the 4–5-year-old children, and it also proves to a certain extent the feasibility and effectiveness of carrying out the children's drama theme activity in the 4–5-year-old of kindergarten in promoting the development of expression ability of the children.

An independent samples t-test was conducted on the pretest scores of the children in the experimental and control classes, and the results showed that there was no significant difference between the overall level of expressive ability and said expressive ability of the children in the experimental class and the children in the control class. There was no significant difference between the pretest and post-test of the control class and no significant difference between the pretest and post-test of the pretest and post-test. Still, after the post-test, there was some improvement in the mean. Still, the improvement was smaller than that of the experimental class. This suggests a significant improvement in children's expressive skills in the experimental class after ten weeks of thematic activities. Through the practical and control classes, we can find no significant difference between the pre-and post-tests, which indicates that the children's theatre theme activities present no gender differences in children's speaking ability. The effect of children's thematic activities on children's expressive ability in the experimental class was more significant than in the control class without intervention. Thematic activities present parity compared to other educational activities, especially regarding gender (Fang Lei, 2020).

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This study investigated the effect of a children's theatre theme activity on the expressive skills of 4–5-year-old children through a 10-week children's theatre theme activity in an experimental class and no intervention in a control class and concluded that. Children's drama thematic activities promoted the development of 4–5-year-old children's speaking skills. The study results showed that the difference between the pretest and post-test scores of the children in the experimental class was highly significant, which suggests that the overall level of children's expressive skills improved significantly after the intervention of children's drama-themed activities.

In the children's theatre, thematic activities had a positive impact on the "length of expression", "vocabulary level", and "sentence structure" of secondary school students. (Leikin, 2014) After a 10-week intervention with children's theatre-themed activities, there was a significant improvement in the expressive skills of children in the experimental class. The results of the independent samples t-test on the post-test scores of the children in the practical and control classes showed that the children in the suitable class scored significantly higher than the children in the control class, i.e., there was a significant difference in the overall level of expressive skills between the two classes. Therefore, the effect of the children's drama theme activity on the children's expressive ability in the experimental class was more pronounced than that in the control class, where no intervention was taken. Children can generate good communication opportunities among themselves, and in a harmonious environment, children are more likely to be creative, especially in terms of language. Due to shared reading, children's expressive ability can be enhanced in a relaxed environment, which differs from ordinary language activities for young children (Jinmei, 2018). In language education, gender characteristics do not affect children's learning ability (Zhang Rui, 2021). In this study, both male and female children improved with the intervention of children's theatre-themed activities, and in the post-test, there was no significant difference. In this study, due to the short period of the study, the examination of children's language ability focused only on children's expressive ability. Children's language ability includes listening, comprehension and speaking. Still, this study did not examine listening and comprehension in-depth, and often, language ability is a whole that consists of these three aspects.

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.

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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.

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