

Fostering Community within the Classroom through Drama Education for Indigenous Children

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ABSTRACT

This study looks at how drama might help indigenous children in a Johor Orang Asli settlement build a sense of community and improve their social skills. It aims to demonstrate that if given more chances to advance their educational backgrounds, children will be interested in learning. The findings of this study will also persuade educators that it is possible to support the social behaviour development of indigenous children. To convey the data, a case study qualitative design was adopted. The data was gathered using observation and interviews as the instruments. The researchers participated in the activities and conducted semi-structured interviews following each theatrical session. Themes were used to analyse the data. The study highlights the effects of drama on social development, including children's increased communication abilities and the improvement of communication skills in children. The results can be used as a general overview by educators and the government to understand how drama might be employed as a teaching approach for indigenous children.

Keywords: Drama, indigenous children, social skill, case study, community, Orang Asli

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The Ministry of Education (MOE) has developed several educational initiatives to help indigenous children develop their academic and social abilities (Aini *et al.*, 2019). Additionally, Non-profit Organisations (NGOs) like Bird Group Taman Negara (BGTN), *Sahabat Jariah* Malaysia (SJM), and Ikhlas.com are taking an opportunity to assist the government in fulfilling their responsibility to provide greater educational possibilities for indigenous children (Ahmad, 2020). The goal of all these alternative classrooms is to narrow the gap between wealthy and impoverished children in terms of their educational and economic background (Harper & Collins, 1975). This shows that the government is aware that formal education is insufficient for these people.

Therefore, as mentioned by Walke (2008), indigenous children have various educational issues that negatively impact their quality of life. Their lack of enthusiasm for education, low academic performance, memory issues, absenteeism rate, lack of parental participation, poverty, and transportation challenges are a few reasons (Md Nor *et al.*, 2016). The delivery system and the health of the educational system from teachers and those in charge of students' education are the sources of the problems experienced (Abdul Samat *et al.*, 2022). Hence, they chose to work or get married young instead of attending school since it was too expensive, or the schools were too far away from their homes. Former Minister of Education Dr Mazlee Malik also emphasised that more than 700 indigenous children missed school in 2018. (Lu, 2019).

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The mindset of underprivileged individuals who refuse to allow their educational development to increase and continue to be ignored and not given sufficient attention has limited their self-growth. However, the cultural influence that their ancestors had passed down limits their mentality to improve their educational background (Deli & Yasin, 2016). All responsible individuals should restructure culturally relevant educational programmes and consider supporting indigenous children through the programs to improve the effectiveness of their education (Afizi *et al.*, 2014). This study considers some difficulties in raising the standard of instruction for indigenous students (Deli & Yasin, 2016). Marginalisation, cultural differences, infrastructure restrictions, and place or geography pose difficulties (Deli & Yasin, 2016). To answer the research question: ‘What are the implications of drama on the social development of indigenous children?’, this paper will investigate the effects of drama on indigenous children’s social development.

The study demonstrated that regardless of a child’s social background, drama instruction can enhance their soft skills (Cicuh Wiarsih, 2017). In addition, according to Abdul Samat *et al.* (2022), drama is an excellent medium for self-expression and drama learning will affect students’ mentally, physically, socially, and emotionally. However, the drama teaching approach takes a lot of time and cannot be used in a standard classroom (Gray *et al.*, 2017). In addition, indigenous children could have trouble with their social abilities. The language barrier prevents them from adequately communicating and makes them typically hesitant among others. In addition, they primarily interact with members of their community (Afizi *et al.*, 2014).

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Vygotsky’s Sociocultural Theory

Vygotsky highlighted the gap between the actual degree of development as measured by the ability to solve problems on one’s own and the level of future development as determined by the ability to solve problems while being guided by an adult or working with more experienced peers (Behroozizad *et al.*, 2014). The zone of proximal growth is a key concept in sociocultural theory. In essence, it consists of all the knowledge and skills that someone can gain with direction but has not yet fully grasped or mastered on their own. It is possible to gradually grow this proximal development region because youngsters are allowed to enhance their knowledge and abilities, frequently by observing someone a little more advanced than they are.

Additionally, a study by Joronen (2011) demonstrate the value of educational drama in fostering cooperation, lowering hostility, enhancing classroom dynamics, and promoting self-confidence in youths (Joronen *et al.*, 2011). Each child exhibits their knowledge, draws on personal experience, and engages in interaction with other children to complete the collaborative act, whether it is as part of a group project to dramatise and reconstruct a story or in an engaging improvisation presentation.

Next, drama education may enhance communication abilities. When people work together, just like when actors work together in dramatic situations, communication skills like listening, understanding, and giving constructive feedback are developed (Mavroudis & Bournelli, 2016). An essential educational drama activity involves having the children try to put themselves or others in a fictional situation. To portray this role, individuals must adopt the persona, define themselves via the character, and recognise the other within themselves. By acting, speaking, experiencing, and exploring the environment, the child

assumes the role of the “other person,” while simultaneously maintaining their own identity as seen by others.

When acting out scenes, children engage all of their senses, including sight, hearing, and their bodies (DICE Consortium, 2010). Children that take drama classes develop their confidence and self-awareness. By participating, they develop socially, escape from their everyday selves, adopt characters, get over their shyness, and interact more freely. With the help of this method, the students are empowered and encouraged to gain the confidence and self-esteem necessary for spontaneous behaviour. Even students who are not naturally talkative appear more likely to join in and be more actively involved in a non-threatening environment.

Teaching drama provides interesting opportunities to inspire students and teachers alike. Learners acquire new language through play, pretending, and meaningful engagement because they may move around, act, and play while learning. The focus of the lesson shifts to the students. Instead, then being a source of knowledge, the teacher now serves as a facilitator. Only active cooperation will make this all work. It has a good effect on the dynamics in the classroom, encourages teamwork, and creates a cohesive learning community. Students must work in groups; therefore, they must respect one another’s opinions and work together to accomplish their objectives. It encourages decision-making, consensus-building, self-acceptance, acceptance of others, and communication skill improvement (Williams-fleck, 2014).

Developing Social Development through Drama

Children from indigenous communities may benefit from the drama in terms of social development. Children’s ability to communicate and work together is referred to as social development. Children’s capacity to perceive and understand when interacting with one another is to as their communication abilities (Coban, 2017). Next, the ability of the children to cooperate and work well with one another is referred to as collaboration abilities. The researcher could assess the social development of indigenous children in two areas using Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory: communication and teamwork abilities (Torres-Velásquez, 2000).

The children’s capacity to pay attention, comply with instructions from the facilitator, accept ideas and perspectives, and offer encouraging words or actions can be used to gauge their communication skills. Next, the ability to overcome shyness, the degree to which children participate in activities, and the ability to lend a hand to others can all be used to assess an individual’s ability for collaboration. Finally, the children may share their thoughts and opinions with others. It can be demonstrated by citing a study by Mages (2018) that emphasises how drama learning boosts children’s participation during drama activities.

Drama for the Indigenous Children

The process and learner-centred nature of drama require participants to visualise, reflect, and engage in self-experience (Demirciolu, 2010). Fonseka (2013) presented a study that attempted to uphold the custom of teaching Shakespearean drama to Sri Lankan indigenous children. In this study, the researcher had difficulty because the study’s chosen participants were rural kids who could not speak English. Thus, he tried to familiarise the children with the vocabulary, pronunciation, and script since they did not normally speak English.

To address the issue, the researcher offered oral learning in which participants may mimic the word pronunciation. To provide a new vocabulary to the indigenous children, the researcher also used the visual learning approach. He dramatised the audio script and then played a recorded performance to compare the

results with their experience portraying the writing. As a result of their ability to absorb the researcher's lessons, the children experience cognitive development and a zone of proximal development toward independence (Fonseka, 2013).

3.0 RESEARCH METHODS

The interpretative and constructivist viewpoints served as the foundation for this qualitative study. Instead of just forecasting results, it tries to gain a deeper grasp of a research topic. In qualitative research, the respondents' learning experiences were generally essentially subjective and susceptible to the prejudices of the researchers and participants. Additionally, the case study design was used. According to Zainal (2015), it enables the researcher to carefully evaluate the data in a particular setting. Also, a case study design usually selects a small geographical area or a minimal number of respondents. In general, a case study examined and explored real-life events through detailed contextual analysis of a limited number of conditions. This statement was supported by Yin (1984, p. 23), as cited in Zainal (2015), which defined the case study design "as an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in real-life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not evident; and in which various sources of evidence are used."

The participants of this study were five to fourteen-year-old indigenous children from an Orang Asli settlement in Johor and three facilitators, one of whom was a volunteer from an NGO, and the other two were language instructors in a public university in Johor. In the first session of the drama, 11 children attended the lesson, and in the second session, 14 children came. 15 children attended the third session, while 17 children attended the last session. Only four children had experienced formal learning, while the others were illiterate. In this study, the children and facilitators were given a pseudonym to keep their identities confidential.

After the four sessions, the course designers who assisted the children in language and drama learning were interviewed. Next, for sampling technique, the researchers used a convenient sampling technique to choose the participants. According to Taherdoost (2016), convenient sampling was the act of selecting respondents because they were easy and ready to be approached by the researcher. The technique was valid when the target population was defined in a broad category (Alvi, 2016). To select the respondents, the researchers had to approach any available member of the target population. Then, they asked that individual to participate in the study, and lastly, if the person displayed consent, the investigation was completed (Alvi, 2016).

4.0 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The effects of drama can be seen in the social development of indigenous children. The collected data were divided into two themes: communication skills among children and developing children's self-esteem.

Communication Skills among Children

Communication skills include verbal and non-verbal communication among indigenous children and between the children and facilitators. Throughout the lessons in four sessions, the children displayed satisfying non-verbal communication skills. Through observation, the older children had no problem with their verbal communication. They could understand the instructions and the rules during the four sessions of drama learning. During the second session, an older child asked, *'Is this drawing supposed to be the moon or the sun?'* (Huda, 14, translated). Based on the question asked by Huda, the children would ask the facilitator if they were unsure about something. Then, the facilitator answered, *'You can decide it by yourself.'* (Farah, translated). The facilitator, Farah, wanted them to discuss and decide among their group member to paint the backdrop. The younger children mostly used non-verbal communication with the facilitators. Even without saying anything, the facilitator understood the child's intention by looking at the child's body language. One of the younger children passed a glue bottle to ask the facilitator to open the bottle for her.

Based on the findings, it can be concluded that there was two-way communication between the children and the facilitators. To motivate the children to learn, the facilitators need to build a supportive relationship by encouraging and giving feedback (Sword, 2020). The children would build more trust in the facilitator through two-way communication. Also, the facilitator let the older children be independent to do the group task, allowing them to discuss and communicate with their group members.

According to the findings, non-verbal communication was shown by the younger children. This is because of the language barrier between the younger children and the facilitators. The younger children were more exposed to the Seletar language as it is their mother tongue and is commonly used at home. The younger children did not go to school and had minimal exposure to the Malay language. Thus, the younger children communicated more non-verbal communication with the facilitators. However, the younger children had no problem communicating with the older children as they used the Seletar language.

The children showed satisfying communication skills during the four sessions of drama class. In conclusion, the older children had no problem with verbal communication when communicating among themselves and with the facilitators. In contrast, the younger children used non-verbal communication to ask for help from the facilitator.

Developing Self-esteem

The children had fun painting and making props during the second session. Although the boys did not care to paint the canvas neatly, they had fun, and they were proud of what they had painted. This can be seen when they asked the facilitator, *'Take a picture of us with the backdrop, please?'* (Haikal, 12 years old, translated). Haikal asked the facilitator to take a picture of him and his friends with their backdrop. Also, one child asked the facilitator to write her name on the ground as she said, *'Can you teach me how to spell my name? I want to put it on the backdrop'* (Fatin, 11 years old, translated).

The final session allowed the children to dramatise the story they had learned. Their self-esteem increased when three of the children volunteered to dramatise in the presence of a friend when one of the children said:

'I want to be the fisherman' (Haikal, 12 years old, translated)

'I will be the wife' (Aina, nine years old, translated)

'I want to be the fish.' (Fatin, 11 years old, translated)

The researchers can see that the volunteers did well during the performance. They were able to express their emotion with the help of the facilitators' narration. Although initially shy, the facilitators motivated them to continue and helped them when needed. Fatin emphasised that she wanted to act as a fish during the showcase.

Based on the findings, the researchers noticed a growth in the children's self-esteem. Most importantly, three children volunteered to act in front of their friends on the last day. Also, the children managed to put up an effective presentation as they could portray the appropriate feelings during the showcase. Their self-confidence also increased when the facilitators complemented them after completing the tasks. Besides, their motivation to showcase their acting was directed by their self-interest. Hence, the drama activity could encourage cooperation and develop self-confidence among children when they could demonstrate their expertise in dramatising the story in the drama performance (Joronen *et al.*, 2011).

Thus, learning through drama can increase their self-esteem. The children interacted with their friends and facilitators without any problem. The actors also managed to act in front of their friends with friends' encouragement.

5.0 CONCLUSION

The article's goal was to evaluate how drama affected indigenous children's social development. The children's social development was influenced by the theme of self-esteem and communication abilities. Throughout the drama lesson, the children engaged in fulfilling verbal and nonverbal interactions with the instructors and their peers. Due to the fact that students had to always work in teams, the activities helped them to exercise their communication abilities. They have the option of approaching the facilitators for assistance at any time. The children were then able to improve their self-esteem. When the story needed to be dramatised, they also offered to act. Overall, the children enjoyed themselves and felt accomplished when they completed the tasks.

This study does have some drawbacks. Firstly, it is the length and frequency of the drama lesson. In a period of four weeks, there were just four lesson days. The class only met for 30 to 40 minutes for each lesson. As a result, the researchers were unable to quantify and carefully monitor the children's educational and social progress. Since there was a significant amount of time between each lesson, some children had problems recalling what they had learned. In order to obtain reliable results, the observation should be repeated at least six times; however, for this study, only four observations were made. Additionally, some of the exercises—like rearranging the words since they could not read—were too challenging for them. The children lacked fundamental abilities like reading and spelling, making dramatising and acting very difficult for them.

It can be concluded that the drama approach has a favourable social development influence on indigenous children. Through learning drama, it was observed that the children's social skills have slightly improved. While taking part in and leading the events, they also gained new learning experiences. The purpose of the observational criteria and interview was to encourage the respondents to consider their opinions on drama. The effectiveness of drama as an entertaining alternative to the traditional classroom for indigenous children was first evaluated in this study as the drama lesson was new for them. This study also offers a novel method to spark children's curiosity about learning and encourage them to pursue

formal education. We believe that the use of this approach by educators can help students become more interested in learning and strengthen their study skills.

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