



## **The Effectiveness of School Theater in Reducing Aggressive Behavior Among Primary School Students**

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### **Abstract**

Upon reviewing the findings of previous studies, the researcher found that most investigations addressed the various objectives of Art Education school theater, including educational, social, religious, political, therapeutic, and other diverse functions. However, to the best of the researcher's knowledge, no prior study has specifically examined the relationship between theatrical performances and their effectiveness in reducing aggressive behavior among students. Accordingly, the problem of the present study can be formulated through the following main research question: What is the effectiveness of theatrical performances in reducing aggressive behavior among primary school students? The current study aimed to identify the effectiveness of theatrical performances in alleviating aggressive behavior among students at the primary school level. Chapter Two presents the theoretical framework and is divided into two sections: the first addresses school theater, while the second discusses aggressive behavior. Chapter Three outlines the research procedures. Chapter Four presents the results, conclusions, recommendations, and suggestions.

**Keywords:** school theater, aggressive behavior, social interaction.

### **Chapter One**

#### **Introduction**

School theater is regarded as one of the most significant educational activities that contributes to the holistic development of students within the school environment. It serves not only as a means of entertainment, but also as an effective pedagogical tool that fosters cognitive, emotional, social, and behavioral growth. Through participation in theatrical activities, students are provided with opportunities to express themselves, develop communication skills, strengthen self-confidence, and engage positively with their peers. Consequently, school theater occupies an important place within the field of Art Education, as it integrates artistic creativity with educational objectives.

In addition to its instructional and recreational functions, school theater also performs an important therapeutic role. Dramatic activities may help students release emotional tension, regulate negative feelings, and modify undesirable patterns of behavior. The interactive nature of theatrical performance encourages cooperation, empathy, and social adjustment, making it a valuable medium for addressing behavioral problems among children, particularly during the primary school stage.

One of the most common behavioral problems observed among primary school students is aggressive behavior, which may manifest in verbal, physical, or social forms. Such behavior can negatively affect the learning environment, peer relationships, and the student's psychological well-being. Therefore, identifying effective educational strategies for reducing aggressive tendencies has become an important concern for educators and researchers alike.

#### **Statement of the Problem**

A review of previous studies revealed that most research has examined the various objectives of school theater, including educational, social, religious, political, therapeutic,



and other functions. However, to the best of the researcher's knowledge, few studies have specifically addressed the relationship between theatrical performances and their effectiveness in reducing aggressive behavior among primary school students.

Furthermore, observation of school theater practices in local schools indicates that those responsible for such activities often focus primarily on educational and recreational outcomes, while overlooking one of the most important functions of school theater: its therapeutic role. This function is no less significant than its other purposes, as it may contribute to addressing certain psychological and behavioral problems, such as aggressive behavior, which is prevalent in many primary schools.

Since the therapeutic objective is one of the essential aims of theatrical activities in schools, school theater can be considered an educational activity that exerts a positive influence on children within the school setting. It may help students achieve school adjustment, develop the ability to engage in social interaction, establish healthy peer relationships, and assist children displaying aggressive behavior in moving beyond the isolation that often separates them from their classmates. Recent studies have emphasized the educational and therapeutic value of drama-based practices in supporting children's psychological, emotional, and social development. Drama and theater activities provide students with opportunities for self-expression, emotional regulation, role-taking, cooperation, and social interaction. These dimensions are closely related to the reduction of aggressive behavior, particularly in school contexts where students require structured, creative, and socially meaningful forms of expression. Berghs et al. (2022) stated that drama therapy may support children and adolescents with psychosocial problems. indicated that drama therapy may contribute to improving psychosocial functioning, coping, regulation processes, and social functioning among children and adolescents. Similarly, Farrington et al. (2019) argued that arts education, including theater, can promote social-emotional competencies such as self-management, interpersonal skills, self-expression, and collaboration.

Based on the review of previous studies and the recognized capacity of theater to enhance social interaction and promote positive relationships among students, the problem of the present study may be formulated through the following main research question:

**Q1\** What is the effectiveness of theatrical performance in reducing aggressive behavior among primary school students?

### **Objective**

The present study aims to identify the effectiveness of theatrical performances in reducing aggressive behavior among primary school students.

### **Research Hypothesis**

The study is based on the following hypothesis:

There are no statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the experimental group and the control group on the aggressive behavior scale in favor of the experimental group in the post-test application.

### **Significance of Study**

The significance of the present study may be summarized as follows:

1. The importance of this study arises from the value of school theater and the need for it as an instrument of guidance, education, instruction, cultural enrichment, entertainment, recreation, and the development of artistic and aesthetic appreciation among primary school students, which may contribute to reducing aggressive behavior.
2. This research carries a humanitarian dimension, as it highlights the impact of wars and occupation on the lives of primary school students who may exhibit aggressive



behavior. Such findings may assist in proposing counseling and preventive approaches through school theatrical activities.

3. School activities are considered an effective means of developing and stimulating students' intellectual, psychological, cognitive, and motor abilities. They encourage reflection and critical thinking, leading to creative engagement that may reduce aggressive tendencies toward others.
4. The study addresses the primary school stage, which is of great importance in nurturing and preparing the future generation.
5. This study may provide educational authorities, decision-makers, and those responsible for the educational sector with indicators for understanding children's behavior and effective methods of dealing with them, thereby contributing to the development of educational plans and programs aimed at reducing the phenomenon of aggression.

### **Delimitations of the Study**

The present study is delimited by the following parameters:

1. **Subject Delimitations:** The study is confined to a selected set of theatrical performances designed to reduce aggressive behavior among primary school students. These performances were enacted by students exhibiting aggressive behavior under the supervision of the Art Education teacher and the researcher.
2. **Temporal Delimitations:** The study was conducted during the 2025–2026 academic year.
3. **Spatial Delimitations:** The present study was implemented at Jarir Primary Mixed School and Al-Thuwar Primary Mixed School.

### **Definition of Terms**

#### **Effectiveness**

Effectiveness refers to the extent to which one independent variable, or a set of independent variables, influences one dependent variable, or a set of dependent variables (Shehata & Al-Najjar, 2003, p. 230).

Operationally, effectiveness is defined as the evaluation of a process that produces observable outputs or results. It represents a measurable comparison between expected and intended outcomes and the actual observed results. Therefore, effectiveness indicates the ability to achieve predetermined objectives (Feleh, 2004, p. 191).

#### **School Theater**

School theater was defined by Al-Ahmad (1997) as a theater or student theatrical troupe supervised financially and artistically by governmental institutions in order to present purposeful and educational theatrical performances that serve students across different types of schools (p. 4).

Modern educational literature supports the view that theater and drama-based activities are not limited to entertainment or artistic performance; rather, they are educational practices that can foster students' social and emotional development. Farrington et al. (2019) explained that arts learning experiences may support the development of social-emotional competencies when they are intentionally guided through practice, reflection, expression, and collaboration. This supports the role of school theater as an educational activity that combines artistic performance with the development of social responsibility, cooperation, empathy, and self-discipline. Hamadah (1971) defined school theater as an amateur theatrical group or stage supervised by the school or an educational institution with the aim of entertaining students, educating them, and training them to practice theatrical arts independently. Its objectives may extend beyond recreation and amusement to include parents and members of the wider community (p. 248).



Operationally, the researcher defines school theater as an engaging artistic activity conducted within the educational institution and practiced by fifth-grade primary school students, with themes of an educational and developmental nature.

### **Aggressive Behavior**

Aggressive behavior was defined by Arnold H. Buss Buss (1962) as a response aimed at eliminating harmful stimuli originating from another person (p. 63).

Abdul Rahman (1970) defined aggressive behavior as any form of rebellion against the general social structure of the group, whether the target of aggression is a person, a value, or social traditions (p. 106).

## **Chapter Two**

### **Section One: School Theater**

School theater is considered the fundamental nucleus from which Iraqi theater emerged. This art form occupies a significant humanistic and educational space within the fields of teaching and learning, in addition to the moral and psychological impact it leaves on the mind and inner self of both the learner and the spectator. It is a form of collective artistic activity whose participants consist of students and schools concerned with theatrical arts, under the supervision of the school. School theater is also regarded as an educational medium that adopts theater as its form and education, with its pedagogical principles, as its content through the use of theatrical techniques (Al-Nawasrah, 2010, p. 36).

School theater plays an important role in the educational process because of its cultural, scientific, social, and psychological benefits for students. For this reason, it has become a focus of attention for those working in the field of education. School theater is one of the instructional methods used in teaching many academic subjects. It also has an effective role in instilling values and moral principles among students. As a collective activity, it has the capacity to involve a large number of students in one shared artistic project. This represents a positive dimension of school theatrical activity, as it can help reject violence, selfishness, isolation, and shyness among some students, while developing a spirit of teamwork, fellowship, affection, cooperation among them (Al-Nawasrah, 2010, p. 40).

Afana and others emphasized that acting in school theater is one of the teaching methods that has attracted considerable attention for its contribution to the educational process. Many educators rely on educational theater to explain several prescribed lessons to students. At the same time, school theaters are an activity practiced by students through the various arts of theater within the school. It may serve as an initial step toward developing students' interest in acting, in addition to being a learning method that can be applied across many school subjects (Afana, 2008, p. 182).

The role of the Art Education teacher becomes evident in bringing students closer to theater through plays or dramatic scenes presented in the classroom or within the school. Here, the role of theater emerges in creating a generation of students who are aware of the diverse cultures surrounding them and who possess a sound understanding of their heritage, civilization, national belonging, and responsibility to preserve their homeland. Through school theater, students can become acquainted with different cultures while maintaining their own cultural identity as well as their national and Islamic identity (Allawi, 2009, p. 26).

The social dimension of school theater is also significant, as it cultivates within students a love for others, cooperation, affection, belonging to the homeland, preservation of public resources, assistance to others, and collective work through the performances they embody on the school stage or during morning assembly. Such experiences have a profound impact on students, whether they participate as performers or as spectators. In the present era, the educational process no longer relies solely on narration and rote instruction. For a long time, educators have searched for more effective methods that allow



students to interact with lessons in a different and more meaningful manner, rather than depending on the traditional methods of narration and memorization that prevailed in the past. Educational theater has therefore played a major and positive role, as teachers have been able to place lessons within a dramatic framework that enables students to comprehend them in an easy and engaging way. This approach directly influences students and contributes to the formation of a conscious personality capable of thinking and understanding the scientific progress taking place around it (Afana, 2008, p. 116).

In addition to acting, school theater involves the integration of several skills from other artistic fields, such as music, drawing, stage design, dance, and recitation, combined with the dramatization of educational curricula, particularly literary curricula. From this perspective, theater is a social form of artistic work that requires the collaboration of many efforts to complete the theatrical production. This is achieved by involving all students who possess creative abilities that can be employed and developed through this activity (Marei, 2002, p. 14).

### **Characteristics of School Theater**

Theater is a creative activity that produces themes capable of refining moral conduct and presenting truths in their various forms and representations. The most important characteristics of school theater may be identified as follows:

1. Theater is a direct means of communication that contributes to producing actual change in the recipient. Communication itself is a process of interaction among members of society, as well as an educational and psychological process, due to its influence in positively modifying behavior (Al-Hilah, 2011, p. 86).
2. Theater clarifies academic content by presenting it in the form of a theatrical text that includes artistic and dramatic dialogue. Through performance, this approach persuades students to acquire dramatized educational experience, helps them understand the curriculum, and develops several cognitive skills, such as inference, interpretation, and analysis. It also contributes to achieving the concept of self-directed learning (Al-Ta'i, 2012, p. 192).
3. The cultural value embodied in school theater appears as a series of interconnected circles within the educational environment and across schools at all stages. Because it includes scientific, economic, political, and literary elements, school theater occupies a distinguished position within the cultural hierarchy of education as a scientific and cultural institution capable of contributing to the construction of a civilized society according to sound educational and scientific principles.

### **Objectives of School Theater**

School theater seeks to achieve several educational, artistic, and developmental objectives, the most important of which are the following:

1. Developing students' ability to pronounce words correctly, particularly in the context of language learning.
2. Enabling students to adapt to different situations and to express their feelings and emotions appropriately.
3. Contributing to the development of students' personalities.

School theater is also concerned with developing students' problem-solving and creative skills. It strengthens their social position and enhances their empathy toward others, as it requires them to think logically and establish relationships between ideas, events, and objects. Rote instruction is no longer considered an effective method for developing students' personalities. Students who participate in school theatrical activities are provided with opportunities for learning and for openness to social life through its various forms and experiences.

This places a responsibility on Art Education teachers to search for new methods, keep pace with the spirit of development, and study social changes in an open and conscious



manner. Their responsibility extends beyond merely presenting an artistic activity without clear justification or educational necessity. Rather, they are required to propose new artistic approaches capable of moving cultural reality from one level to a more advanced and competent one. This is particularly important because developed countries compete in the fields of technology and science just as they do in the arts, in order to achieve a refined and elevated level of taste that is consistent with the dignity of the contemporary human being (Mahdi, 2014, pp. 74–75).

Accordingly, the objectives that the teacher formulates and adopts as professional responsibilities include the following:

1. Creating a situation or event that gives students the opportunity to express themselves while simultaneously engaging them in the educational process.
2. Selecting topics that interest students and motivate them to participate, deepen their thinking, sharpen their creative abilities, gain their affection and trust, and enrich their knowledge through theatrical activities.
3. Selecting activities or assigning tasks that students are able to perform and that contribute to expanding their perceptions, encouraging independent thinking, and promoting self-evaluation.

Some scholars of educational sociology and social psychology have emphasized that trained groups of students who are managed democratically tend to be more effective, more productive, and higher in morale, as trainees are given the freedom to express their feelings and emotions (Falih, 1972, p. 67). Training, therefore, focuses on the practical and applied aspects of learning, which helps students acquire authentic experience.

### **Features of School Theater**

School theater has played a significant role in establishing a theatrical foundation for students across different educational stages, not only in Iraq but also in most Arab countries. Theatrical activities directed toward students were traditionally performed within the school setting and were designed to achieve purely educational objectives. From this context, school theater emerged, and its components derived their vitality, continuity, and subject matter from the fundamental elements of the school environment.

In this regard, the school play aims to support the educational process, operates within its atmosphere, and is framed by its objectives. In other words, the theatrical performance in this context is essentially a school-based performance that does not exceed the boundaries of the school. The theatrical text represents the foundation upon which the performance is built. It is usually a curriculum-oriented text structured in an educational manner and designed to dramatize school curricula in ways that are closer to students' understanding and comprehension.

Such a text is typically written by a teacher within the school. The director of the performance is also usually a teacher, who assumes the role of the "teacher-director." This teacher-director selects the performers exclusively from among the students. After the processes of instruction, rehearsal, and role embodiment are completed, the performance becomes ready for presentation. At this stage, a stage or an appropriate performance space is required, along with an audience to view the performance.

These elements are generally easy to arrange within the school context. The performance space is often the classroom itself, although in some cases the school courtyard or playground may be used. After preparing a simple stage, the performance is presented before an audience composed of teachers, students, and parents. These represent the most prominent features and conditions of school theater that prevailed in the schools of the country (Al-Ka'bi, 2014, pp. 170–171).



## **Benefits of School Theater**

### **1. Psychological Level**

Many psychologists maintain that acting is one of the most important methods used to achieve psychological healing. When an individual performs a role in a dramatic work, or watches such a performance, this often contributes to reducing psychological tension and releasing suppressed emotions. This occurs when the actor or spectator becomes immersed in the atmosphere of the dramatic performance and identifies with a particular role within it. Among the psychological phenomena that may be addressed through acting are shyness, introversion, and speech disorders (Ward, 1966, p. 16).

Some people may associate acting only with recreation and entertainment. However, this understanding is limited, as dramatic performances are effective communicative messages used to express a particular idea, concept, or feeling. Theater relies on language, body movements, facial expressions, gestures, and modes of speech. These elements make it a powerful social medium for education, influence, and guidance, in addition to purposeful recreation and entertainment (Al-Tayyib et al., n.d., p. 16).

It is noticeable that the lack of attention to students' problems in some schools may result from neglecting the psychological dimension of their lives. This neglect is often associated with the absence of extracurricular activities, such as art, sports, and other forms of creative engagement. Consequently, students may be forced to express their inner energies, talents, and abilities in inappropriate ways, which may lead to problems, disturbances, and behaviors associated with aggression.

From this perspective, theater plays an important role in addressing fear and shyness related to facing others, both of which may affect the student's ability to speak and deliver words properly. Such difficulties may result in speech problems, such as stuttering and hesitation. These issues may be treated by enabling the theatrical trainer to build the student's self-confidence, reduce fear, and encourage direct engagement with an audience through theatrical practice. This may be achieved, for example, by asking students to present poetic or prose passages before an audience. Theater, therefore, has the capacity to release the suppressed energies within the child, restore psychological balance, and achieve its appeal on two levels: the aesthetic level and the intellectual level (Marion, 1961, p. 17).

### **2. Economic Level**

Students' participation in producing a theatrical performance develops in them a sense of economy and avoidance of waste. For example, they may learn to preserve paints, avoid excessive use of materials, and not leave drawing supplies in open containers where they may be damaged. They may also benefit from old pieces of furniture in constructing stage sets required by theatrical scenes. All of this provides students with a practical lesson in economy, the preservation of available resources, and the appropriate use of materials at the proper time.

### **3. Cooperation and Skill Acquisition Level**

Theatrical performance and the implementation of its requirements impose upon students a form of participation in various activities and in different types of arts and tasks required by the performance. For instance, students may contribute to operating the lighting, cutting pieces of fabric, or preparing materials used in stage decoration. As a result, each student may acquire different practical and artistic skills, in addition to developing an awareness of the importance of cooperation, organization, and discipline in future social life.

## **Section Two: Aggressive Behavior**

Aggressive behavior is considered one of the most harmful and costly psychological and behavioral disturbances affecting society. At present, no therapeutic method has been



conclusively proven to be effective in reducing the severity of behavioral disorders over the long term (Pepler, 1991, p. 35).

Aggressive behavior in an individual can be identified through a set of distinctive characteristics. These include the intensity and persistence of the behavior, the frequency and chronicity of its occurrence, the presence of several hostile behavioral patterns at the same time, and the extent to which such behavior disrupts daily functioning. Among these characteristics, the intensity and persistence of behavior are regarded as the most important indicators. In other words, the degree to which students engage in fighting, lying, or other disruptive behaviors determines whether such behavior deserves attention and should be taken into serious consideration.

The disruption of daily functioning is also a decisive factor in distinguishing ordinary behavior from aggressive behavior. Aggressive behavior is not limited to observable external actions; rather, it also involves several cognitive processes. Students who display antisocial behaviors often show deficiencies in cognitive problem-solving skills, which constitute the foundation of effective social interaction. Moreover, an aggressive individual may spend a considerable amount of time mentally reviewing the harm inflicted upon him by others and the deprivation imposed upon him (Al-Hamdani, 1985, p. 32).

Aggression may appear in several forms, including aggression toward animals and individuals. In this form, the aggressive student often dominates others, threatens them, and causes them fear and distress. He may frequently initiate fights with others and may use a weapon or object capable of causing serious physical harm, such as a stick, broken glass, a knife, or similar objects. Such behavior may also involve cruelty toward others and physical cruelty toward animals.

Aggression may also be directed toward property, as in the deliberate destruction of others' belongings. Another form is deception, which may involve frequent lying or falsification to achieve a personal goal.

### **Aggressive Behavior in Children**

Aggressive behavior in children is defined as behavior that results in personal harm or the destruction of property. The term *aggression* refers to behavior intentionally directed toward harming an individual, a group of individuals, or the surrounding community. A child should not be judged as aggressive, or as possessing aggressive behavior, merely because he or she has committed a single aggressive act. Rather, such a judgment becomes possible when the behavior is repeated to the extent that it becomes one of the child's personality traits. Aggressive behavior among children is often associated with difficulties in emotional regulation, social interaction, and constructive expression of feelings. Drama-based interventions may provide an appropriate educational and psychological context for addressing such difficulties. Korošec and Batistič Zorec (2020) found that creative drama and puppetry activities helped children understand interpersonal relationships, take the perspective of others, and recognize alternative ways of behaving in social situations. This finding is directly related to the present study, as school theater may help students replace aggressive responses with more cooperative and socially acceptable forms of behavior.

It is natural for aggressive behavior to appear in a child who has been exposed to certain conditions or situations that provoke such behavior. However, when this behavior is repeated and becomes a behavioral habit practiced by the child, the child may then be described as aggressive. It should also be taken into consideration that children may display aggression as a response or reaction to environmental pressures and social restrictions.



Aggression may appear in the following forms:

1. **Physical Aggression:** This includes all behaviors practiced through bodily movement in attacking others or damaging objects, such as hitting, kicking, pulling, pushing, breaking, or tampering with things.
2. **Symbolic or Passive Aggression:** This includes behaviors that express contempt for others, ridicule them, or draw attention to an insult directed toward them.
3. **Verbal Aggression:** This refers to aggression that remains within the limits of speech, without clear physical involvement. It includes insulting others, describing them with negative attributes, calling them by names they dislike, accusing them of wrongdoing, or addressing them in a loud and offensive manner (Al-Rifa'i, 1987, p. 46).

### **Failure and Harm as Factors Contributing to Aggression**

Some scholars have argued that aggressive behavior is instinctive and that it represents a response to hormonal activity or reflects electrical activity in the nervous system; that is, it is associated with neurological activity. Others have viewed aggression as a latent psychological energy that may emerge and result in harm or injury either to others or to oneself. Another perspective suggests that aggressive behavior appears as a result of frustration, as frustration often functions in many situations as an effective stimulus for aggressive behavior and may be regarded as a natural reaction to frustration.

Other scholars maintain that aggressive behavior develops within a specific system, which may be explained as follows:

#### **1. Imitation of Aggression in Children**

Children learn through observation by witnessing aggressive behavior in their surrounding environment, including the family, school, peer group, and broader society. For example, a child may observe his father hitting his siblings or may see one of his peers attacking another. In addition, children may be exposed to scenes of crime and aggression on television.

In all cases, when a child observes aggressive behavior and notices that it is reinforced, the likelihood of imitating such behavior increases. Reinforcement may occur when the child's needs are met through the use of aggression; in this case, satisfying the child's demands functions as reinforcement for aggressive behavior. Consequently, the child becomes more likely to reproduce this behavior. Aggressive behavior is often more evident among boys than among girls.

#### **2. Aggression as a Habit in Children**

If a child's aggressive behavior is reinforced by the parents, particularly when they respond to the child's demands and desires because of such behavior, this behavior is likely to be repeated. Over time, it may become a stable characteristic of the child's personality rather than a temporary response to specific situations (Al-Habis, 2004, pp. 24–25).

#### **3. Motives of Aggression in Children**

There are three main dimensions that influence behavior:

- a. The stimuli that precedes the behavior.
- b. The consequences resulting from the performance of the behavior.
- c. What individuals perceive, think about, and use in interpreting the situation.

These dimensions become clear when the child is exposed to disturbing stimuli, such as frustration, abuse, assault, physical or verbal threat, ridicule, or mockery, all of which may produce pain and tension. Such stimuli prepare the ground for emotional arousal, which may appear through aggressive behavior or dependent behavior.



When a child engages in one of these behaviors and receives a pleasant outcome or reinforcement, such as acceptance by others, praise, approval, or the fulfillment of needs and demands, the behavior may be repeated. If the behavior is repeated more than once and is reinforced, it may become one of the child's personality traits. The child then learns that aggression is a means of obtaining demands and a successful method for satisfying needs. This idea becomes established in the child's thinking.

Therefore, a child should be judged on the basis of a pattern of repeated behaviors, not on the basis of a single isolated act. Among the behaviors that may appear in children with such disturbances are the following (Al-Habis, 2004, pp. 26–27):

1. Excessive fighting with others.
2. Harassment and manipulation.
3. Cruelty toward people and surrounding objects.
4. Running away from home or school.
5. Manipulation, lying, and deception.
6. Stealing and destroying property, either individually or with peers.
7. Severe and persistent disobedience.
8. Engaging in a number of behaviors for which the child provides no clear justification.

## **Theories Explaining Aggressive Behavior**

### **First: Psychoanalytic Theory**

Freud paid considerable attention to aggression and interpreted it within the framework of his psychoanalytic theory, particularly during the period of the First World War. According to Freud, the human being is born with two basic instincts: the death instinct and the life instinct. The death instinct expresses the desire for domination, power, destruction, and annihilation, whereas the life instinct manifests itself through tendencies that are opposite to these, such as sympathy, closeness, and positive bonds with oneself and others.

Freud assumed that the death instinct appears through self-destructive behavior, which, in its most severe form, may include suicide, as well as through aggression directed toward others. He argued that aggressive instincts are located in the id and contain psychic energies resulting from the transformation of sexual energy. When these instincts become active, they come under the direction of the ego and the superego, with the latter representing the highest authority over the death instincts. Innate aggression may therefore take hidden and indirect forms. However, Freud gave primary attention to sexual instinct and regarded it as the driving force behind behavior (Faisal, 1996, p. 174).

According to this theory, the origin of violence is directed inward, thereby becoming a threat to the structure of the personality through destruction and annihilation. This threat activates psychological defense mechanisms that seek to protect the individual's psychological structure through what are known in psychology as defense mechanisms, such as repression, projection, sublimation, regression, and others. These mechanisms represent adaptive attempts to reduce the tension resulting from the violent interaction between the two instincts when directed inward.

In cases of splitting, the self is divided into two aspects: one representing goodness and the other representing aggression. In order to preserve the integrity of the self, destructive tendencies are often externalized. This process is known as projection, that is, the projection of aggressive impulses onto others. Freud's views concerning unconscious motives indicate that certain behaviors are not consciously recognized by the individual, yet they exert a significant influence on behavior (Al-Obaidi, 2003, p. 66).

### **Second: Behavioral Theory**

Proponents of behavioral theory, including Skinner, Thorndike, Bandura, and others, regarded aggressive behavior as learned behavior. This theory rejected Freud's view that aggression is instinctive. Bandura maintained that the learning of violence begins at an



early stage and occurs through the processes of reward and punishment. The consequences resulting from an individual's behavior may shape future behavior, particularly when those consequences are negative.

Accordingly, behavioral theory considers aggressive behavior to be acquired through learning. Its proponents assumed that the counselee or learner may acquire aggressive behavior either directly or indirectly through interaction with the surrounding environment, observation, reinforcement, and imitation (Abdul Salam, 1990, p. 78).

### **Third: Frustration Theory**

Frustration theory maintains that a high degree of stimulation and motivation, combined with an inability to adjust or adapt to certain situations, may lead to frustration and, consequently, to aggression. An individual's sensitivity to frustrating situations depends on several factors, including heredity, patterns of socialization, cultural and social levels, parental culture, and genetic factors, all of which may significantly influence the individual's response to frustrating experiences (Rajih, 1990, p. 549).

It is worth noting that the intensity of aggression depends on the strength of the elements of frustration. The stronger and more influential these elements are, the more intense the expected aggressive response is likely to be, and vice versa.

Dollard proposed using Freud's theory as a foundation for frustration theory. His theory was known as the "circular theory of aggression," which suggests that aggression has both a physiological basis and a behavioral foundation. Frustration refers to the obstruction of an individual's efforts to achieve or accomplish goals. It represents a force that blocks and disrupts the goal-directed response. According to this theory, frustration produces a specific state similar to other motivational states, such as hunger and thirst. Relative deprivation may also lead to an emotional response represented by anger (Asma, 2007, p. 127).

However, several factors may provoke aggression, not frustration alone. These factors may include darkness, climate, temperature, and humidity. Frustration may be understood as the obstruction of goal achievement and the prevention of satisfying material and psychological needs. Other theories have also addressed aggression, including the culture of violence theory, collective behavior theory, and ethological theory.

From the preceding discussion, it may be concluded that there are both points of difference and points of similarity among these theories. The most important principles on which these theories generally agree are as follows:

1. Aggressive behavior is a negative phenomenon for both individuals and society.
2. Some behaviors emerge through conscious processes, whereas others emerge through unconscious processes.
3. Several factors contribute to the formation of aggressive behavior, including parental culture, the individual's social status and surrounding environment, economic conditions, inherited or innate factors, mass media and the types of films presented, prevailing values, frustrations, population density, and other related factors.
4. Aggression appears in several forms, including physical aggression, symbolic aggression, verbal aggression, and aggression against property.
5. Aggressive behavior can be measured because it is recurrent and observable.
6. Aggressive behavior is an activity that seeks to achieve a goal in one form or another.
7. Aggressive behavior tends to be more frequent among male adolescents than female adolescents.
8. Projection is one of the methods that may assist in identifying aggressive behavior.
9. The factors underlying feelings of hostility are multiple and varied (Sayyid Arees, 1986, p. 13).



## **Psychology of School Theater**

Since its emergence, theater has remained a collective form of artistic practice in which the actor receives support during difficult or embarrassing situations that may occur on stage. In school theater, however, such situations are often less apparent for the student-actor, as the student does not stand alone on stage but receives support from other students performing alongside him. Nevertheless, the student-actor may experience an instinctive sense of anxiety, fearing that he may forget his lines or movements for some reason, particularly under the psychological pressure created by the performance setting and by the presence of an audience whose members closely observe every major and minor movement.

Therefore, it becomes important to provide methods that help the actor reduce the feeling that mistakes may occur, even if only to a limited degree, by lessening the sense of isolation, the weakness of support, and the dominance of the auditorium over the actor. Although the actor may not clearly see the audience, the student who performs remains committed to the director's instructions. These instructions help restore the student's self-confidence, enabling the actor to influence the spectators seated in the performance hall, especially when they are classmates, teachers, and family members. Yet the auditorium remains a living, breathing space, and this sense of presence may disturb the actor to an extent that exceeds expectation. The more the actor listens to the hidden rhythm of the audience's breathing, the more fear may dominate him, as a result of the power exercised by the auditorium and its spectators (Jean Duvignaud, 1976, p. 98).

When school students participate in a school theatrical performance, they do not always lose concentration while performing their characters. This indicates that they may become harmonized with movement and dialogue, while maintaining focus, attention, control of movement, and balance on stage. Melhem indicated that when an actor enters the theater as an amateur performer, what he primarily seeks is to control himself during performance and to influence the audience. He attempts to subject his behavior on stage to the supervision of his consciousness. At this point, the actor himself becomes the object of his own attention, including his actions and personal experiences on stage (Melhem, 2006, p. 161).

The embodiment of a character helps the student-actor gain control over the emotions of the spectators in the hall. When this occurs, the student becomes aware that he has achieved considerable success in performing and embodying the character assigned to him. The collective attention directed toward the student-actor by families, teachers, and peers creates a positive psychological atmosphere that elevates the student and his classmates, making them feel proud of the achievement they have accomplished. At the same time, the audience cannot be completely forgotten. Attempts to force oneself to believe that one is alone on stage and that no one is watching are neither realistic nor desirable. The actor should remember that an audience is observing him; however, he must distance himself from fear and focus his attention on his psychological and physical actions.

The actor must study and analyze the character he embodies and, through this process, simulate the character's behavior. The process of character embodiment is linked to discovering the emotional and affective traits of the character—that is, understanding the character's desires, actions, and motivations. Through knowledge of the character's desires, actions, and events, the actor becomes able to embody the character's behavior. Since the actor has made the character influential for the audience, he becomes more capable of embodying future characters. The psychological factor within the theatrical atmosphere may make the actor anxious and tense; therefore, the actor should be encouraged to imagine that all objects on stage, including scenery and furniture, are living performers moving before him (Al-Khatib, 1981, p. 34). From a psychological perspective, theatrical participation allows students to experience symbolic expression, role embodiment, emotional distance, and interaction with others in a structured artistic



environment. Berghs et al. (2022) reported that drama therapy uses drama and theater processes to promote psychological growth and may positively affect psychosocial problems, internalizing and externalizing difficulties, coping, and regulation processes. Keiller and Melvin (2023) may also be used here to support the role of drama therapy interventions in helping children and adolescents experiencing emotional distress. These findings strengthen the argument that school theater can serve as a psychologically meaningful activity that helps students' express emotions, reduce tension, and develop more adaptive behavioral responses.

The psychological state enables the actor to direct his attention properly so that his body and nerves remain in a balanced and positive condition. It is acceptable for the actor to feel inwardly joyful even when performing a role in a tragic theatrical presentation. In order to broaden the actor's imaginative capacity, he must practice imagination, which refers to the actor's ability to imagine different life images and characters and to retrieve their forms from memory. The actor's task is to transform the story of the play into an artistic scenic reality. Imagination plays an important role in this process of transformation. Therefore, the actor must ensure that his imagination functions appropriately, and it must be strengthened, refined, and developed. It should remain alert, rich, effective, and active (Al-Khatib, 1981, p. 57).

### **Chapter Three**

#### **Research Methodology and Procedures**

##### **Research Method**

The researcher adopted the experimental method in the present study because it is the most appropriate scientific and systematic approach for achieving the objectives of the research.

##### **Research Population**

The population of the present study consisted of fifth-grade primary school students in the Second Al-Karkh Directorate of Education, specifically at Jarir Primary School and Al-Thuwar Primary School. The total population comprised 112 male and female students during the 2025–2026 academic year.

##### **Research Sample**

The research sample was limited to 20 fifth-grade students distributed across the two schools. The sample consisted of 10 male students and 10 female students, all of whom were 10 years old.

##### **Research Instrument**

The research instrument consisted of an observation checklist. The researcher developed the instrument based on previous studies, the exploratory study, and the opinions of schoolteachers. In its initial form, the checklist consisted of 30 items. After presenting the instrument to a panel of experts to determine the validity and appropriateness of the items, the researcher calculated the percentage of agreement among them regarding the performance items. The agreement rate reached 85%. Accordingly, the final version of the instrument consisted of 25 items.

##### **Reliability of the Instrument**

The researcher applied the research instrument to an exploratory sample consisting of 20 male and female fifth-grade primary school students. These students were selected according to the judgments of male and female teachers, who identified them as exhibiting aggressive behavior. The application lasted for two weeks. The researcher also relied on two observers. Using Scott's formula, the reliability coefficient of the instrument reached 87%.



## Application of the Instrument

The researcher applied the research instrument, represented by the observation checklist, to the main research sample consisting of 20 male and female students. The instrument was administered before and after the implementation of the independent variable, represented by two theatrical performances, in order to identify their effect on reducing aggressive behavior among the students.

The application was conducted with the assistance of two observers, as they were more familiar with the students than the researcher due to their continuous presence with them as members of the teaching staff.

## Statistical Methods

The researcher used the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) to analyze the data. The following statistical procedures were employed:

### 1. Cooper's Formula

Cooper's formula was used to calculate the validity of the instrument:

$$P_a = \frac{A_g}{A_g + D_g} \times 100$$

where:

$P_a$  = percentage of agreement

$A_g$  = number of agreements

$D_g$  = number of disagreements

### 2. Scott's Formula

Scott's formula was used to calculate the reliability of the instrument:

$$T_i = \frac{P_o - P_e}{1 - P_e}$$

where:

$T_i$  = Scott's reliability coefficient

$P_o$  = observed agreement

$P_e$  = expected agreement by chance.

### 3. One-Sample *t* Test

A one-sample *t* test was used to examine the statistical differences related to the study variables.

## Chapter Four

### Research Results

After statistically analyzing the data, the researcher reached the following results, as presented in Table 1.

**Table 1:** Results of the Paired-Samples *t* Test for the Pre- and Post-Applications of the Aggressive Behavior Observation Checklist

Test	Sample Size	Mean	Mean Difference	Calculated <i>t</i> Value	Tabulated <i>t</i> Value	Level of Significance
Pre-test	20	35.00	—	—	—	0.05
Post-test	20	21.37	13.63	4.53	2.093	0.05

The table above indicates an improvement among the students in the research sample based on the application of the aggressive behavior observation checklist and the scores obtained in the pre- and post-tests. After applying the paired-samples *t* test, the calculated *t* value was found to be 4.053. When compared with the tabulated *t* value of 2.093 at a significance level of 0.05 and 19 degrees of freedom, it is evident that the calculated *t* value is greater than the tabulated *t* value. Accordingly, the null hypothesis of the present study was rejected.



This result indicates that school theater had a positive effect on reducing aggressive behavior among primary school students. This may be attributed to the positive characteristics of school theater, including collective work, selflessness, and the strengthening of social relationships among students. In addition, theatrical performances contribute to instilling educational and social values in students.

The findings of the present study are consistent with recent research emphasizing the positive effects of drama-based interventions on children's emotional and behavioral development. The decrease in aggressive behavior among the students after participating in theatrical performances may be attributed to the nature of school theater itself, which encourages cooperation, emotional expression, role-taking, self-control, and interaction with peers. This interpretation is supported by Korošec and Batistič Zorec (2020), who found that creative drama activities contributed to reducing aggressive behavior by helping children understand interpersonal relationships and alternative behavioral responses. It is also consistent with Mojahed et al. (2021), who found that group psychodrama was effective in reducing aggression and social anxiety among children.

The results may also be interpreted considering the broader relationship between arts education and social-emotional learning. Farrington et al. (2019) suggested that arts education can support the development of students' self-management, interpersonal skills, self-expression, and collaboration. These competencies are closely related to reducing aggressive behavior, as students who can express themselves artistically and interact cooperatively with others may become less likely to rely on verbal or physical aggression. Therefore, the positive effect of school theater in the present study can be understood as a result of its artistic, educational, and social-emotional dimensions.

### **Conclusions**

After completing the analysis of the results of the present study, the researcher reached the following conclusions:

1. School theater has a positive effect on reducing aggressive behavior among primary school students. In the researcher's view, this may be attributed to the positive characteristics of school theater, such as collective work, selflessness, the stimulation of creative abilities, and the strengthening of social relationships among students.
2. School theater plays an effective role in educating students and promoting their cultural development toward more positive forms of behavior and awareness.
3. Theatrical performances contribute to instilling educational, social, and artistic values in students through the scenes, events, and artistic situations they present.
4. School theater contributes to developing students' cultural awareness, particularly in relation to their personalities, self-expression, and artistic appreciation of creative works.
5. School theater serves as a link between artistic activities and the school curriculum. It supports students' development in several areas, enriches their experiences and knowledge, and increases their interest in academic subjects.
6. School theater encourages students to value group belonging and collective work. It also helps reduce introversion and social avoidance, restoring students' self-confidence through care, affection, and positive interaction, which may encourage them to develop love and respect for others.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings of the present study and considering recent literature on drama-based interventions and arts education, it is recommended that school theater be adopted as part of structured Art Education programs in primary schools. Such programs should be designed not only to develop artistic skills, but also to enhance students' emotional regulation, cooperation, empathy, self-expression, and social interaction, the researcher recommends the following:



1. Adopting school theater as an effective approach for identifying aggressive students and distinguishing them from their non-aggressive peers.
2. Emphasizing the importance of research that examines the psychological dimensions of school theater.
3. Incorporating school theater as a subject within the Art Education curriculum at the primary school level.
4. Organizing training courses in theatrical arts to rehabilitate and develop the competencies of specialists in this field.
5. Encouraging students to participate in school theatrical performances and related artistic activities.

### **Suggestions for Further Research**

The researcher proposes the following future studies:

1. Conducting a similar study to examine the effect of school theater on aggressive students at the intermediate school level.
2. Conducting a study on the effect of school theater in developing creative abilities among primary school students.
3. Conducting a study on the difficulties facing school theater in schools and the possible ways of developing and improving it.

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