

# Teachers' Perceptions on Drama's Role in Enhancing Young Learners' Developmental Domains

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## Abstract

The study aimed to investigate teachers' perceptions on drama's role in enhancing young learners' developmental domains. The sample consisted of (133) cooperative- teachers chosen upon availability from the collaborating schools with the Classroom Teacher and the Early Childhood Education Practicum Courses in the University of Jordan. The cooperative-teachers' perceptions data was collected through a questionnaire designed by the researcher based on the literature review related to drama as a teaching tool. The instrument included three main domains; the social-emotional, linguistic-communicative and cognitive domain. The findings revealed that drama highly enhanced young learners' developmental domains, in which the social-emotional domain came as the highest score according to the teachers' perceptions. The results also revealed that both the specialization and experience variables proved not to cause any statistical significant differences on the cooperative- teachers' perceptions about the role of drama in teaching young learners. Further studies were recommended on investigating teachers' actual practices in applying drama in their teaching actions.

**Keywords:** cooperative teachers, developmental domains, drama, teachers' perceptions

## 1. Introduction

It is in the early stages of life that the effect of a learning process, will last and continue throughout the following years. Rababah(2012),mentions that young learners' educators are becoming increasingly more aware of the importance of promoting the physical, social, cognitive, emotional, and moral aspects of the development and the learning of a child.

The better we treat our children today, the more prosperous future we grant for the coming generation. Thus, many institutions and organizations have invested a great deal in developing this area. Anghelescu and her colleagues (2010), explain that in 2002, UNICEF started a global project for the early learning and development standards (ELDS). In which, children were recognized as active learners rather than passive recipients; where they learn through play and active involvement. The notion, that children must be exposed to rich learning opportunities within different contexts, was highly emphasized. The content of (ELDS) highlights the fact that early learning and development includes multidimensional and interrelated domains. These multi- dimensional domains include: physical, social-emotional, linguistic-communicative, and cognitive developmental domains; all of which highly contribute to the child's learning and growing process.

In education, the path to success and achievement is paved by ensuring motivation and positive attitude towards learning. And drama can create the difference and start the sparkle that lightens the sense of longing to learn. Massey asserts that the positive learning environment creates the learner's enthusiasm to learn (Massey, 2003).

According to Wagner (1998), drama in education helps the students to develop different life- skills such as empathy and critical thinking. He believes that drama includes different ways in achieving the development of a child's cognitive skills as well as his/her communicative skills.

Drama practitioner researchers stress the effect of play and active experiences on knowledge and intellectual capability (Neelands, 2006; Bolton,1998; O'Neill, 1995; Norman 1999). Furthermore, other researchers found that drama in education provided learners with real-life situations, where they promoted their cognitive and social-emotional skills.

Wells (1993), conducted a study in order to examine elementary teachers' use of creative drama and their

perceptions of it as a major instructional approach. Results revealed that teachers showed interest in learning and using dramatic forms, and supported the use of creative drama as an effective approach in teaching. However, teachers still proved to consider the lack of time and space as major obstacles in using creative drama.

Mike Fleming, Christine Merrell and Peter Tymms (2004), conducted a research project, where they examined the impact of The National Theatre's Transformation Drama Project on young students' reading, mathematics, attitude, self-concept, and creative writing in primary schools. The transformational groups were matched to the control groups. The results indicated a clear added value to the transformational groups, in which their scores were frequently higher and more positive than the control groups. Students' self-concept scores proved to be the highest. Moreover, their mathematic skills improved as well as their attitudes, where they showed an increase in confidence.

McNaughton (2010), conducted a study on the implementation of drama in developing Education for Sustainable Development (ESD). This study was built on the hypothesis that drama might be useful for learning in Primary stages. The researcher concluded that the implication of drama allows the young learners to improve their thinking skills; such as decision making, communicating, interpreting, judging, and other higher thinking skills. Moreover, drama proved to develop social-emotional skills, such as supporting other members of the group, turn-taking, consideration, empathy, and patience. In summary, drama offered a positive learning experience within a positive learning environment that generated sustainable development on the learner's part.

Ranzau, (2016), conducted a study on teachers' perceptions of drama as a teaching tool. The teachers concluded that students showed increased abilities in their cooperation, engagement, comprehension, and reasoning skills. In this research, drama pedagogy was addressed in which it was defined as a term that covered several drama activities such as role-play, tableau, and improvisation. Thus, drama pedagogy can be defined as a collection of drama-based teaching and learning strategies to engage students in effective learning experiences.

Neelands (2000), views drama as a providing- source to meaningful learning, where children explore language and identity. For many years, researchers viewed drama as an effective tool in language learning; (O'Neill 1998; Wagner, 1998; Podlozny 2000), they all believed that drama strongly influenced the child's language skills.

A research study conducted by Mages(2008), In which she investigated the impact of theater –in- education curriculum on children's language and cognitive development. The sample consisted (155) child enrolled in (12) different Head Start sites in New York City. The investigations were carried out in a quasi-experimental context. The children, assessed, showed significant improvement towards the last stage of the study, in which the English language learners closed the gap with their peers and showed improvement on all levels.

Dunn and Stinson (2011), investigated the effect of drama as a pedagogical tool on language learning. In their analysis, they emphasized that a lesson should be artistic and educational for young learners throughout their language-learning journey.

Promoting the child's thinking skills through drama involves a combination of visual, auditory and kinesthetic learning. Hence, addressing the thresholds of the brain engages the child's creative and critical thinking skills. Therefore, many researchers were encouraged to investigate the effect of drama in developing a child's cognitive domain.

Overton and Chatzichristodoulou (2010), conducted a study in order to explore the teaching of science concepts through the use of performing arts, where learning takes place through a combination of auditory, visual, and kinesthetic methods. The researchers showed great interest in developing critical thinking through the use of performing arts. Data was collected by questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. In this study, scientific-concepts were addressed throughout the application of performing arts. The primary-stage-students, included in this study, explored a shift in attitude and engagement after the use of performing arts.

Thomson (2001), discusses that social-emotional skills are enhanced in the child's early experiences, where adults use different strategies that address such skills such as dramatic play. Dewing(2010), concluded in his study that active-learning settings improve children's developmental skills. He found that thinking increases after active-learning and motivation is created in order to enhance developmental skills.

Socialization, is one of the most important processes in one's life, thus, it would be logical to expect that young learners should be encouraged to socialize within their classroom environments. Yusuf Sen and colleagues (2014), conducted a study in order to determine the effects of an English learning program on young learners' socialization process throughout employing active learning activities such as drama. Twenty eight participants were divided into two groups based on their ages. Each group was taught English for (120) hours in (6) weeks. Students were interviewed before the program and after it. The students were regularly observed by the researchers in both the instructional settings and in the social settings for four weeks. The data was analyzed qualitatively. The results of

the analysis showed that the program significantly contributed to the young learners' socialization process.

Hui and her colleagues (2011), conducted a study, where they investigated the effect of drama in an educational project on students and teachers. Kindergarten and primary teachers took part in a 24-hour teacher -training -program on applying drama in their classes. A group of students were randomly chosen to be the experimental group as for the control group; it was chosen from the same school and was taught by the same teachers, but in a traditional manner. The results of the post test showed that the students in the experimental group performed higher verbal expressions in story-telling. The teachers showed significant change in fostering creative teaching techniques. The findings also, showed that the teachers, through showing more commitment to drama, helped their students to be more independent and cooperative learners.

## **2. Objectives of the Study**

This study aimed to investigate teachers' perceptions on drama's role in enhancing young learners' developmental domains.

### *2.1 The Importance of the Study*

The importance of this study emerges from the uniqueness of the subject within the Jordanian field; as the researcher could not find studies investigating the impact of drama on the young learners' developmental and learning domains. Furthermore, this study comes in line with the Jordanian Ministry of Education's interest in addressing young learners' active learning and well-being of a child. The Ministry of Education in Jordan gives great value to young learners' education; in hope that they will turn into creative and effective individuals in the future. Educators continue to seek productive ways in helping young children to develop their different skills and knowledge in a way that will allow them to become productive members in their societies. Thus, drama can be applied, as a teaching tool and a means towards an end, where active learning enhances the child's sense of well-being and becoming.

### *2.2 Study Problem and Questions*

The first years of a persons' life determines the rest of the journey. This explains the intense research regarding this crucial stage, which will affect the rest of the stages in a human's life. Therefore, the mission of a teacher should target the development of the child in different domains. It is from this point, the importance of the teachers' awareness of the role of drama in teaching young learners emerges, in which drama is considered a way of teaching that nurtures the child's developmental and learning domains. Teachers play a tremendous part in molding a balanced character, thus they should appreciate certain means such as drama towards determined ends in constructing a whole balanced individual. Thus, the aim of this study is to examine teachers' perceptions on drama's role in enhancing young learners' developmental domains.

### *2.3 This Study Attempted to Answer the Following Questions*

What is the role of drama in enhancing young learners' developmental domains from the cooperative teachers' perceptions?

Do cooperative teachers' perceptions about the role of drama in enhancing young learners' developmental domains differ depending on the specialization, and experience?

### *2.4 Definitions*

#### *Definition of Terms*

**Cooperative- Teachers:** They are a group of teachers who work at mostly private cooperative schools in Amman. These teachers could either be kindergarten teachers or classroom teachers, who teach at collaborating schools, which cooperate with the Classroom Teacher and the Early Childhood Education Practicum Courses in the University of Jordan. Furthermore, their practices can influence the children they teach and the student-teachers of whom they train during the practicum course.

**Developmental domains:** These are several domains that affect the child's learning and growth, in this study they will be addressed as social-emotional, linguistic-communicative and cognitive. The social-emotional domain deals with child's self-awareness, identity, confidence and empathy. As for the linguistic-communicative domain, it deals with the different language and communication skills, which enable a child to express and communicate his/her ideas clearly and effectively. Finally, the cognitive domain addresses different thinking skills, problem-solving, reasoning and imagination.

**Drama:** is a performing art, an effective learning tool and a way of learning. It includes activities such as role-play, improvisation and play-making. It allows the participants to reach their highest potentials, where a child's different

developing domains can be enhanced, if applied wisely and functionally.

**Teachers' Perceptions:** They are the views of the teachers, who teach young learners, and their thoughts that generate their teaching practices in using drama, which enhances the child's learning and development.

### *2.5 Limitations of the Study*

#### The Study is Limited Within

The sample of the study was limited to teachers who mostly work at private schools in Amman, which cooperate with the Practical Educational Course in the University of Jordan.

Drama's role in teaching young children, as a research topic is very rare, which made it difficult to refer to previous studies, due to its scarcity.

The developmental domains, examined in this study, included several developmental and learning domains, however, and not all of them.

The results of the study are limited to its instrument and the research procedures.

## **3. Methodology of the Study**

### *3.1 Sample of the Study*

The study included all kindergarten and classroom teachers, who work in the first semester of the academic year (2016-2017) in the private school sectors of the Ministry of Education in Amman,/Department of Special Education/ Directorate of Education of the University/Capital Governorate. The sample was chosen upon availability; and of which are collaborating with the Classroom Teacher and the Early Childhood Education Practicum Courses in the University of Jordan, and have accepted to cooperate voluntary and willingly. The total number of the cooperating teachers reached (133). Table (1) presents the sample's distribution.

Table 1. Sample distribution according to variables

Source	Variables	Count
Specialization	Childhood Education	56
	Classroom Teacher	44
	Other specialization	33
	Total	133
Experience	>5	59
	5-10	44
	<10	30
	Total	133

### *3.2 Instrument of the Study*

In order to collect data of the study, a questionnaire was developed to identify the cooperative teachers' perceptions on drama's role in enhancing young learners' developmental domains. Also, the effect of some variables such as specialization and experience in forming their perceptions, were identified as well. The questionnaire was constructed based on the literature review and previous studies related to the subject such as: (Wells, 1993; Wagner, 1998; Ranzau, 2016; Mike Fleming et al.,2012). The questionnaire in its primary version included (43) items distributed into three domains; (social-emotional, 13 items), (linguistic-communicative, 14 items), and (cognitive, 16 items). The answering of the items required the use of a five Likert-scale (never, rarely, sometimes, often, always) to determine the degree of the cooperative teacher's perception of the role of drama in teaching young children. Each item included the following scales: never (1), rarely (2), sometimes (3), often (4), always (5). The following criterion was adopted for judging the degree of the teacher's perceptions of the role of drama in teaching young learners: low perception (1-2.33), medium (2.34-3.67) and high (3.68 - 5).

### *3.4 Validity and Reliability of the Instrument*

To ensure psychometric characteristics of the instrument, the instrument was translated into Arabic, and was presented to a group of specialists in the field of Early Childhood Education, who were able to judge the instrument's validity. They were requested to evaluate the suitability of the instrument in terms of the purpose of the study, the correlation of each item with its domain. In terms of content validity, they were also requested to add comments or suggestions they consider appropriate in terms of deletion, addition or modification to the content

of the items. In light of these criteria, the proposed modifications were carried out. The questionnaire obtained logical validity indications presented by (80%) of the reviewers. The final version of the questionnaire consisted of (28) items distributed in three domains: (social- emotional, 10),(linguistic- communicative, 8), and (cognitive, 10).

In order to ensure the reliability of the questionnaire, internal consistency coefficients were extracted for the overall instrument, and for each of its domains on its own by using Cronbach Alpha Formula. The value of the Alpha Coefficient concerning the instrument as a whole unit showed (0.89). The value of the Alpha Coefficient, concerning the first domain was: (0.78) for the (social-emotional),(0.75) for the second domain; (linguistic-communicative), and finally, (0.79) for the third domain; (cognitive). These values were considered acceptable for the purpose of this study.

### 3.5 Study Procedures

After going through the different procedures of the study such as: developing the instrument of the study, verifying its validity and reliability, limiting the population of the study accurately, the questionnaire was distributed to the cooperative-, teachers who agreed to participate in this study. The aim of the study and the questionnaire was explained to the participants. The confidentiality was ensured to be maintained, where the responder and the school's identity was not declared. The number of the retrieved answered questionnaires reached (133) questionnaire with full information. Statistical Package for the Sciences (SPSS) was applied for statistical analysis purposes, in which the results were extracted and presented in the following discussion.

## 4. Results and Discussion

### 4.1 The Findings of the First Question

1-What is the role of drama in teaching young learners from the cooperative teachers' perceptions?

In order to answer the first question, the means and the standard deviations of the total score were calculated on the scale, its domains, and of each item within the scale.

**Table 2. Means and Standard Deviation for Cooperative Teachers' Perceptions on the Role of Drama in Enhancing the Child's Developmental Domains**

N	Developmental Domains	Mean	Std. Deviation	Effect level
1	Social-emotional	4.27	0.40	High
2	Linguistic-communicative	4.05	0.24	High
3	Cognitive	3.95	0.34	High
	Total	4.09	0.26	High

Table (2) shows that teachers' perceptions of the roles of drama in children's education were generally high with an average of (4.09) and a standard deviation of (0.26). The highest score of drama's role in teaching children was in the social-emotional domain with a mean of (4.27) and a standard deviation of (0.24), followed by the linguistic-communicative domain with a mean of (4.05) and a standard deviation of (0.24). Finally, the cognitive domain came last with a mean of (3.95) and a standard deviation of (0.26). In all previous domains, the participants' perceptions of the role of drama in children's education were high. Many researchers such as (O'Neill, 1995; Bolton, 1998; Wagner, 1998; Neelands, 2007), discussed the impact of participating in drama activities. They agreed that drama allows the students to gain social skills, generate and use spoken and written skills, and acquire critical thinking skills. The findings come in coherence with such an agreement.

The following shows the means and standard deviations of cooperative teachers' perceptions on the role of drama in children's education within the three domains; (social-emotional, linguistic-communicative, and cognitive domain), all proved to be high and are presented below.

#### a. Social-Emotional Domain

**Table 3. Means and Standard deviation of the Social-Emotional Domain**

N	Item	Mean	Std. Deviation	Effect level
22	Drama enhances the child's confidence	4.43	.512	high
23	Drama develops the child's positive attitude towards learning	4.43	.512	high
25	Drama develops the child's sense of belonging	4.34	.491	high

26	Drama develops the child's character	4.34	.662	high
20	Drama improves the child's empathy skills	4.32	.467	high
27	Drama contributes to the child's value system	4.23	.623	high
28	Drama ensures a child's identity	4.23	.638	high
21	Drama develops the child's leadership skills	4.20	.633	high
19	Drama enhances the child's ability to connect with others	4.10	.562	high
24	Drama enhances the child's cooperative spirit	4.08	.585	high

It is clear from Table (3), that the perceptions of the cooperative teachers on the role of drama in enhancing the social-emotional domain were all high, with an average of (4.27) and a standard of deviation (.568). These results come in agreement with many research findings, in which drama proved to enhance different developmental domains for the child. Mike Fleming et al. (2004), investigate the impact of a theater project on young students' attitude and self-concept. The results indicated a positive increase on students' scores in all areas, however, the social-emotional domain scores proved to be the highest score.

#### b. Linguistic-Communicative Domain

Table 4. Means and standard deviations of the linguistic-communicative domain

N	Item	Mean	Std. Deviation	Effect level
2	Drama develops the child's communicative skills	4.79	.409	high
5	Drama improves child's use of language skills	4.44	.498	high
6	Drama develops the child's oral expression	4.44	.498	high
1	Drama develops the child's ability to express effectively	4.41	.698	high
7	Drama contributes to the child's flow of speech	4.22	.620	high
4	Drama enriches the child's choice of vocabulary	4.20	.941	high
3	Drama enhances the child's listening skills	3.99	1.258	high
8	Drama develops the child's writing skills	2.88	.739	moderate

It is clear from Table (4) that the perceptions of the cooperative- teachers on the role of drama in enhancing the linguistic-communicative domain were high, in almost all the items except for one item, with an average of (4.79) and a standard of deviation (0.409). The previous result comes in agreement with what Julie Dunn and Madonna Stinson (2011), stressed in their research; for more than thirty years drama has been considered as a valuable tool in teaching language, in which it has promoted language learning through applying an artistic pedagogy. The lowest estimation for the role of the drama in enhancing the linguistic-communicative domain, was represented in item 8, which was "Drama develops the child's writing skills" with an average of(2.88), and a standard deviation of(0.739). This makes sense, due to the fact that the writing skill is the latest language skill developed in early learning stages. Thus, it requires a much more highly sophisticated integration and progression of the child's other developmental skills.

#### c. Cognitive Domain

Table 5. Means and Standard deviation of the Cognitive Domain

N	Item	Mean	Std. Deviation	Effect level
11	Drama enriches the child's imagination	4.33	.472	high
10	Drama develops the child's problem- solving skills	4.23	.576	high
12	Drama develops the child's ability in decision- making	4.11	.568	high
9	Drama stimulates the child's critical thinking skills	3.98	.476	high
14	Drama contributes to the child's ability in generating ideas	3.98	.668	high
15	Drama promotes the child 's creativity	3.98	.816	high
18	Drama encourages the child's logical thinking skills	3.86	.740	high
16	Drama develops the child's judgment skills	3.76	.780	high
17	Drama enables the child to think in a unique manner	3.76	.780	high
13	Drama contributes to the child's categorizing skills	3.55	.499	moderate

It is clear from Table (5) that the perceptions of the cooperative- teachers of the role of drama in teaching the thinking skills were high in almost all the items, except for one item, with an average of (4.34) and a standard deviation of (0.637). These results came in agreement with what Dewing (2010) indicated in his research, in which he stressed that thinking increases after active-learning and motivation is created in order to enhance the developmental skills. The results show that the teachers seem to share same perception regarding the impact of using drama on the learner's cognitive domain, where such perceptions are affected by knowledge-competencies along with the in- service training they undergo throughout their teaching experiences. In the Jordanian field, private schools are very competitive; they become obliged to empower their staff- teachers' knowledge and practices with the current trends in teaching in order to gain good reputation among the private schools. The lowest estimation for the role of the drama in enhancing the cognitive domain, was represented in item 13, which was "Drama contributes to the child's categorizing skills" with an average of (3.55) and a standard deviation of (0.499).A reason behind this could be that categorizing, is a highly sophisticated thinking skills, therefore, teachers might tend to address it less through active learning based on play..

#### *4.2 The Findings of the Second Question*

2-Do cooperative teachers' perceptions on the role of drama in teaching young learners differ depending on the specialization, and experience?

a. Do teachers' perceptions on the role of drama in teaching young learners differ depending on specialization?

In order to answer this question, the means and standard deviations of the cooperative- teachers' perceptions on the role of drama in teaching young learners according to the specialization variable were calculated. Furthermore, the (ANOVA) test was used in order to examine the categories' significant differences among the specialization variable.

Table 6. Test results that show the difference between teacher perceptions on the role of drama in teaching young learners according to specialization variable

Specialization	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Kindergarten	56	4.08	0.26
Classroom teacher	44	4.10	0.26
Others	33	4.11	0.25
Total	133	4.09	0.26

It is clear from the table that there are minimal differences in the perceptions of the cooperative teachers' perception son the role of drama in teaching young learners among the categories of the specialization variable. To find out if these differences are statistically significant, the (ANOVA) test was used and results are displayed in the following table.

Table 7. Results of Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) for the significant differences in the responses of the cooperative- teachers on the role of drama in teaching young learners among the specialization variable

source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Specialization	0.02	2	0.01	0.15	0.857
Error	8.59	130	0.07		
Total	8.61	132			

Table 7. shows that there are no statistically significant differences in the perceptions of the cooperative-teachers on the role of drama in teaching young learners, due to the specialization variable, where the value of F (0.15) is not statistically significant at the level of significance ( $\alpha = 0.05$ ). This finding could be a result of wide-spread pedagogical policy of considering drama as a productive teaching tool among different school systems. Thus, teachers have clearly declared their perceptions about applying drama in their teaching strategies. Furthermore, addressing active learning, when teaching young learners within a social context is no more a choice in considering developmental appropriate practices. Moreover many teachers undergo different in-service training programs, in which drama is addressed as a productive teaching tool.

b. Do teachers' perceptions of the role of drama in teaching young learners differ depending on years of experience?

In order to answer this question, the means and standard deviations of the cooperative- teachers' perceptions on the role of drama in teaching young learners according to the experience variable were calculated. Furthermore, the (ANOVA) test was used in order to examine the categories' significant differences among the years of experience variable.

Table 8. Test results show the difference between cooperative- teachers' perceptions on the role of drama in teaching young learners according to the years of experience variable

Experience	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Less than 5 years	59	4.11	0.24
5--10	44	4.10	0.26
More than 10 years	30	4.06	0.28
Total	133	4.09	0.26

It is clear from the table that there are apparent differences in the perceptions of the cooperative- teachers' on the role of drama in teaching young learners among the categories of the years of experience variable. To find out if these differences are statistically significant, the (ANOVA) test was used and results are displayed in the following table.

Table 9. Results of Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) for the significant differences in the responses of the cooperative- teachers on the role of drama in teaching young learners among the years of experience variable

source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Experience	0.04	2	0.02	0.30	0.743
Error	8.57	130	0.07		
Total	8.61	132			

Table 9. shows that there are no statistically significant differences in the perceptions of the cooperative teachers on the role of drama in teaching young learners, due to the years of experience variable, where the value of F came (0.30), which was not statistically significant at the level of significance ( $\alpha = 0.05$ ). This again, unexpected result, could be a result of the on- going professional development, where teachers continuously undergo different training sessions, no matter the years of experience in teaching. Thus, it is well- known that schools nowadays thrive to pursue a good reputation within the schooling field. Therefore, their teachers apply modern teaching strategies, which address the high demands of the teaching field. A final reason that could have caused such an unexpected finding, lies within the fact, that this result was based on teachers' expressed perceptions, however, not on their actual practices in class. This comes in line with the findings of different studies regarding pedagogical beliefs, such as Nespor (1987), Pajares (1992), and Kagan and Tippins (1997), where teachers' beliefs are passed through their actual practices and not through their word- perceptions.

## 5. Conclusions and Recommendations

The present study aimed at investigating teachers' perceptions on drama's role in enhancing young learners' developmental domains. The results revealed that drama highly enhanced the chosen developmental domains of the child in this study. This implies that the teachers showed high appreciation to the role of drama in teaching young learners and in enhancing their social-emotional, linguistic- communicative, and cognitive domains. Thus, drama proved to weave these developing and learning skills into base-form of a balanced individual. It is recommended that teachers' practices in class are studied, in which their actual applications of drama are investigated and cross matched with their perceptions. Furthermore, qualitative studies on the use of drama in teaching young learners are recommended. Moreover, further developmental and learning domains should be considered while conducting research on drama's effect on the development of the young learners.

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