

RECEPTION AS AN INTERACTIVE PRACTICE IN EDUCATIONAL THEATRE FOR CHILDREN AND ITS ROLE IN MEANING CONSTRUCTION

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Abstract: Reception plays a major role in educational theatre, especially when it comes to the child, this small being who is considered a blank page that can be easily influenced and shaped. The process of theatrical reception is not spontaneous or simple; rather, it involves several elements such as education, culture, environment, and the individual's personal artistic background. Therefore, this process in theatre relies on two main components: what the theatre presents through its actors, director, and playwright, and what we, as spectators, decode while engaging with the symbols, suggestions, and meanings of the performance. Educational theatre, is one of its most significant forms and serves as an effective medium for developing a child's scientific, educational, and artistic capacities, and for activating these abilities during the stages of childhood and schooling. Educational theatre is characterized by multiple functions and objectives: it contributes to instilling ethical values, nurturing imagination, and enhancing critical thinking, in addition to developing communication and expressive skills. This makes it a powerful and effective educational tool both inside and outside formal educational institutions. The process of reception in theatre is not limited to merely watching a performance or enjoying its aesthetic appeal; it extends to establishing an interactive relationship between the audience and what is presented on stage. This interaction allows the child to understand, reflect, and participate emotionally, encouraging them to ask questions and infer meanings. It creates a broader space for reception and comprehension, making the theatrical experience a fully integrated educational and developmental process that contributes to shaping the child's personality and enhancing their artistic and cultural. This study examines the role of reception in educational theatre, particularly in relation to children.

Keywords: Reception, Educational Theatre, Children's Theatre, Audience Participation, Child Reception, Theatre Education.

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1. Introduction

The reception in theatre is not limited to the mere act of watching a performance or enjoying the aesthetic pleasure it offers through visual and auditory elements. Rather, it extends to a complex interactive process in which the audience participates with their awareness, sensitivity, and cognitive background. A theatrical performance becomes complete only through this dynamic engagement, which transforms the experience from passive viewing into an active dialogue—both internal and external—between the spectator and what unfolds on stage. Thus, a broad sphere of reception is formed, one that contributes to deepened understanding, expanded interpretation, and the opening of new horizons for discussion and analysis, making theatre a space for intellectual and emotional exchange.

The role of the audience is therefore central in constructing meaning during a theatrical performance. Spectators interpret the signs, symbols, and signals conveyed by the performance's discourse, reconstructing them through their knowledge, expectations, and prior experiences. In this way, the audience shifts from being mere observers to active participants in shaping the theatrical experience. This participatory involvement represents one of the most significant criteria for a successful performance—its ability to engage viewers in the creative process and transform them into integral contributors to the theatrical event itself. Theatre directors and practitioners, from the earliest forms of theatre to the present day, have continuously emphasized this dialectical relationship between sender and receiver, recognizing its vital role in enriching and evolving the language of theatre.

This interaction becomes even more significant when the audience consists of children who are still undergoing psychological, cognitive, and emotional development. Children possess heightened sensitivity to theatrical messages and respond to their components with spontaneity and immediacy, which positions theatre as an effective educational tool capable of shaping their personalities and refining their skills. Contemporary theatre increasingly seeks to involve children directly in the creation and production of performances, providing them with opportunities for experimentation, creativity, and self-expression. This is especially evident in educational theatre, which functions as an influential pedagogical and aesthetic medium that nurtures children's awareness, enhances their expressive abilities, stimulates creative thinking, strengthens self-confidence, and empowers them to make decisions and interact positively with their environment.

1.1. Statement of the Problem

The topic of reception in educational theatre for children raises a fundamental problem regarding how children interact with the theatrical discourse addressed to them, particularly given their distinctive cognitive and psychological characteristics that differentiate their reception from that of adult audiences. While educational theatre aims to achieve pedagogical, aesthetic, and instructional objectives, its success largely depends on its ability to make effective use of children's modes of reception and guide them in a way that enables meaning-making, awareness development, and skill enhancement.

This leads to the central question:

How does reception in educational theatre for children contribute to the construction of meaning within the theatrical performance, and how do the child's psychological, cognitive, and behavioural characteristics interact with theatrical discourse in understanding its content and assimilating its educational and aesthetic dimensions?

A related sub-question emerges from this research problem: To what extent does educational theatre succeed in employing reception as a tool for learning, education, and artistic development?

1.2. Study Objectives

This study aims to shed light on the concept of reception in educational theatre directed at children, through a theoretical and analytical approach that focuses on the nature of the child's interaction with theatrical discourse. It also seeks to clarify how meaning is constructed by the child as a recipient through various theatrical elements such as language, image, movement, and symbolism.

The study further aims to analyse selected models of Algerian children's theatre in order to reveal the educational and behavioural values they convey, such as honesty and the conflict between good and evil, and their impact on shaping the child's awareness.

In addition, the study seeks to highlight the educational role of educational theatre in developing the child's perception and guiding their behaviour, through an understanding of the interactive relationship between the theatrical performance and the audience, within a framework that combines both aesthetic and educational dimensions.

Finally, the study aims to demonstrate that reception in children's theatre is not a passive process, but rather a dynamic one that contributes to building experience and enhancing understanding within the child's cultural and educational context.

1.3. Methodology

This study adopts the descriptive-analytical method to examine the phenomenon of reception in educational theatre directed at children, through a theoretical framework based on describing and analysing key concepts within their artistic and educational context. The study begins by defining central concepts such as reception, educational theatre, and children's theatre, then proceeds to analyse the interactive relationship between the theatrical performance and the child audience, with a focus on the role of psychological, cognitive, and behavioural characteristics in shaping understanding and constructing meaning. The study also employs content analysis by deconstructing theatrical discourse and its expressive elements (language, movement, image, and symbolism) in order to reveal the mechanisms through which they influence the child's perception and response. Furthermore, the study draws on a review of literature and previous research, utilizing relevant theoretical frameworks from the fields of theatre, education, and psychology to interpret the phenomenon and highlight its educational and aesthetic dimensions.

Thus, this methodology seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of reception as a dynamic and interactive process that contributes to achieving the educational and artistic objectives of educational theatre.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1. The Concept of Reception

The term "reception" refers to the act of receiving something, and it also denotes the elements that influence a specific audience's interpretation of artistic, literary, or media discourse. In other words, it is the action performed by an individual, as a human being with psychological, cognitive, emotional, and social components, to interpret the meaning presented to them. This process involves sensation, intelligence, perception, and the construction of meaning (Al-Sharif, 2021).

Wolfgang Iser is considered one of the most important figures who had a clear impact on reception theory in general. He also played a major role in defining reception, alongside his colleague Hans Robert Jauss, as both are regarded among the most prominent theorists due to the ideas they introduced within the framework of the aesthetics of reception. Iser had a significant influence on the development of several concepts, particularly those related to the

construction of meaning and the role of the reader in extracting meaning from the text. For Iser, the reader is responsible for producing and creating meaning. He believes that reception is the study of the text based on the responses of readers, while also recognizing that the text itself provides the mode of reception and influences the reader. Accordingly, for Iser, effect and reception constitute the main connecting points in reception aesthetics. “Effect” refers to the textual and theoretical strategies, whereas “reception” refers to the historical and social dimensions. The responses of readers that arise from reading are the result of both the process of reception and the process of effect and being affected. (Bouhjar, 2022)

Accordingly, Iser considers that the process of reception is based on two fundamental elements:

- **Effect:** which is related to the textual structure and the strategies employed by the text to guide the reader.
- **Reception:** which is concerned with readers’ responses, shaped by their historical and social contexts.

Thus, meaning does not arise solely from the text, nor from the reader alone, but from the interaction between the two. The text guides the way it is received, while the reader contributes to completing its meanings. Therefore, readers’ responses are the result of a shared process that combines the effect exerted by the text and the reception carried out by the reader.

2.2. Educational Theatre

Educational theatre is considered a form of instructional theatre and one of the important media that can be used to develop and enhance children’s scientific, educational, and artistic capacities during the stages of childhood and schooling. It is also regarded as an effective means that contributes to the psychological, cognitive, and social formation of the child. Educational theatre relies on employing theatrical techniques and elements to present various life situations and human models from which students can learn numerous educational, ethical, social, and academic lessons (Badr Ali, 1988).

It is an approach that combines the elements of theatre and education, as it utilizes theatrical means to provide an experience with an educational purpose. It includes the elements of theatre such as the audience, who are the students, the performance space, which is the school, and external influences like arts, music, lighting, and costumes. The way theatre is employed depends on the method of the theatrical program itself. Educational theatre is not merely another form of conventional theatre; rather, it differs fundamentally in terms of preparation, objectives, and content (Al- Shteivi, 1988).

Educational plays are written to present scientific material to children in a simple theatrical form through which they can understand historical events, geographical landmarks, natural sciences, and more. Their scripts are prepared in advance, and they can be widely used to introduce various subjects, curricula, and educational concepts in a way that connects the child to their school or club, due to the excitement they offer and the positive role they give the child in the learning process. In this type of theatre, the scenes performed by the children themselves play a significant and important role; these are known as “curriculum plays.” This kind of theatre resembles guided play directed at the child by adults, and it achieves the same objectives. (Husseini, 1995)

Theatre is an ideal educational and pedagogical tool; it teaches nurtures, provides information, instils values, corrects behaviour, and develops skills.

2.3. *Children's Theatre*

Children's theatre is a branch of adult theatre and generally shares its characteristics, with differences in the level of the script, the type of actors, as well as the goals and ideas presented. It focuses on theatrical texts that address issues relevant to children and offer objectives and ideas appropriate to their age levels. (Abu Ma'al, 1984)

Children's theatre is also considered a form of theatre that helps develop a child's motivation toward learning, as it represents a self-driven activity performed by the child or student. It fosters positive emotions and sound understanding by stimulating various feelings such as admiration and fear, enriching the child's linguistic repertoire, and helping them overcome certain psychological issues. (Goldberg, 1990)

It can be said that children's theatre is any theatre that serves childhood, whether performed by adults or children, as long as the goal is to entertain the child, provide enjoyment, and stimulate their knowledge, emotions, and physical awareness. It may also refer to situations in which the child performs acting roles and dramatic situations to communicate with both adults and peers. (Mahmoud, 2019).

The art of theatre is not merely the art of the actor's performance, nor the play itself, nor dramatic staging (the arrangement of theatrical form), nor dance; rather, it is a combination of the elements that constitute these different forms. It is made up of movement, which represents the conscience of the actor's art; of words, which form the body of the play; of colours and lines, which express the spirit of stage design; and of rhythm, which is the foundation of dance (Pavis, 2015). All these elements together are what capture the child's attention and increase their concentration, allowing the message to reach them more quickly. For this reason, educational theatre provides an easy and effective means of upbringing, teaching, and instilling positive values and morals, which the child receives with openness and enthusiasm.

3. The Specificity of Reception in Children

The child is a dynamic being who never ceases to move, act, and interact. For children, art represents a language of thought. As the child grows, the forms through which they express their ideas, emotions, and interests change, and they develop increasingly complex relationships of self-knowledge and understanding of their environment—whether in their verbal, emotional, or motor expressions. The arts in particular, and aesthetic education in general, can contribute significantly to fostering this growth and expression in children, adolescents, and even adults in their unique forms. (Abdel-Hamid, 2001)

From this standpoint, the issue of reception in artistic discourse in general, and theatrical discourse in particular, emerges clearly. The discourse directed at children becomes more complex than that addressed to adults because young audiences are constantly expressive and ever-changing, especially during early developmental stages, which are among the most important stages of preparation—stages of rules and tasks. (Goldberg, 1988)

Moreover, childhood is the stage in which the foundations are built and the components of reception and response are formed. These components nurture the child's awareness, comprehension, readiness, and experience needed to decipher the symbols directed toward them, thereby enabling them to reinterpret the message (the performance) and produce meaning. Therefore, the sender (theatre maker) must understand the age characteristics of children and the artistic and aesthetic characteristics of theatrical discourse. Preparing the child as a theatre recipient is an essential need that educators and artists must strive to meet in order for the discourse to be complete and for the artistic and educational function of theatre to be fulfilled. In this context, the audience becomes a fundamental element involving

multiple disciplines—literary, scientific, educational, artistic, and biological. Theatre relies on a set of expressive means that combine auditory, visual, psychological, and intuitive elements. It does not rely solely on spoken language; rather, its universality comes from this multiplicity of expressive languages, each with its own characteristics. Theatre also operates through signs, as everything that appears on stage is considered a meaningful sign. (Siza, 1987).

4. Reception in Children's Theatre

The child represents a dynamic structure whose human components cannot be fully understood without referring to this integrated whole. The same applies to theatrical discourse: it is an interconnected structure whose components cannot be examined in isolation from the organic whole that forms its unity. Hence the risk of practicing children's theatre without expertise and understanding of both the art form and the world of the child. Therefore, attention must be given to the theatrical message directed at the child and to the necessary conditions regarding theme, language, characters, and other technical elements that constitute the overall structure of the theatrical performance. Likewise, the child must be prepared for the appropriate level of reception and trained to interpret the performance holistically. (Al-Ansari, 1996)

A child's response as a theatre recipient is innocent and naïve, fluctuating between reality and what is seen on stage. However, as the child's experiences increase, this response gradually transforms into empathetic understanding—an intellectual perception of the situation presented. Since the purpose of theatre directed at children is to build their personality, develop their intellectual and imaginative abilities, and provide entertainment and education simultaneously through its comprehensive expressive elements, this purpose cannot be achieved unless it resonates with the child. The child must be regarded as a key partner in shaping the theatrical experience and reproducing it. The performance is based on objectives related to the child's psychological, social, and cognitive characteristics. Thus, certain artistic and expressive elements must be taken into account by the sender (the theatre maker) to achieve an aesthetic response in the child. These elements include:

- Focusing on a single main character to simplify tracking and understanding.
- Ensuring that the story is simple and clear, with amusing situations.
- Entering directly into the objectives once the curtain rises.
- Using graceful movement, elements of total theatre, rhythmic actions, dance and songs.
- Employing theatrical techniques (scenery, lighting, etc.) in an expressive and aesthetically stimulating manner. (Al-Sharoni, 1993)

The effectiveness of reception in children's theatre should rise to the level of active participation in the performance through various communicative methods, such as answering the actors' questions during the play or contributing to writing the script. Participation can also occur during rehearsals, where the performance may be evaluated. Through feedback, the reception process can be refined based on the information received by the sender from the receiver regarding the success or failure of the performance, thereby enabling better adjustment of future messages. (Al-Tai, 2009)

Reception in children's theatre is considered an interactive process based on an integrated understanding of both the structure of the theatrical performance and the psychological and cognitive characteristics of the child. In its early stages, the child's response is characterized by spontaneity and simplicity, where perception blends reality with imagination. However, this response gradually develops over time, becoming more conscious and capable of empathetic understanding of theatrical situations. The effectiveness of children's theatre is closely linked to its ability to engage the child's emotions, through simplifying the dramatic

structure, focusing on a central character, presenting a clear plot, and employing expressive elements such as movement, music, and theatrical techniques in an aesthetic manner. The child is also regarded as an active participant in the theatrical process, whether through direct interaction or feedback, which contributes to improving the quality of reception and enhances the role of theatre as an effective educational and communicative medium

5. Objectives of Educational Theatre

Educational theatre works to achieve multiple educational and pedagogical objectives, including the following:

5.1. Acquiring and Developing Moral Values in Children

The importance of educational school theatre stems from the fact that it is an educational medium capable of bringing about change in society by developing feelings and stirring emotions through the solutions and ideas suggested by theatrical performances. This, in turn, “enriches the student’s ability to express themselves, enhances their capacity to deal with problems and situations, develops leadership skills and human emotions such as compassion and empathy, promotes acquaintance and noble trust, combats bad and immoral habits, and simplifies academic subjects by presenting them theatrically in an engaging manner” (Milad, 2011).

5.2. Social Development of the Child

The social development of the pupil constitutes an effective foundation for child upbringing, which the school adopts especially in the early stages. Educational theatre is an activity that can be utilized as a form of discourse aimed at meeting the child’s social needs and strengthening their sense of national belonging. This is achieved through “what is presented in theatrical performances at different levels, as theatrical work for children is collective in nature and requires positive participation from everyone. All participants must cooperate without self-centeredness or selfishness in order to achieve the collective goal. Such collective work develops a sense of the importance of cooperation for the success of the group and fosters in the child a feeling of belonging to the group” (Hussein, 1995).

5.3. Developing Self-Confidence among Students

There is no doubt that educational theatre is an effective means of confronting the difficulties and issues that disrupt life around children and hinder their interaction—especially those who suffer from psychological problems and negative energies that make them unable to express themselves. Educational theatre helps instil self-confidence, which contributes to “forming a positive and balanced self-image that supports healthy personal development. Through training, students’ confidence in themselves and their abilities increases, while they receive support and motivation” (Hussein, 1995) Through theatrical performances, it is possible to create psychological balance, free students from feelings of sadness and depression, and provide them with opportunities to express many repressed emotions, thus achieving social, linguistic, and emotional communication and strengthening their connection with their surroundings. It also helps the child “fulfill their desires in a compensatory manner that develops their ability to overcome distress, resentment, anger, and psychological pressures” (Hassan, 2004).

5.4. Role Modelling through Positive Examples

Good role models have a long-lasting impact on children’s minds, as they represent a fundamental pillar that should be presented to their thinking and an effective means of correcting incorrect and undesirable behavioural patterns among children. Educational theatre serves as a medium for conveying enriching experiences and positive life lessons to children.

It introduces students to figures and role models who have shaped the history of their nations and contributed to the advancement of humanity, whether at the local or global level. Children take these figures as examples in their lives, which encourages “identification and emulation in their daily lives and striving to resemble them through the positive models that represent good role models” (Hussein, 1995).

5.5. Developing creative and cognitive abilities

Educational theatre is a means of satisfying children’s desire for knowledge, developing their cognitive abilities, and enriching their linguistic repertoire with new vocabulary, which makes them more capable of creativity and helps reveal their talents, energies, and skills. These experiences broaden their horizons in areas such as writing, music, acting, and stage design. They also make them “more capable of understanding themselves and others, thanks to the questions that theatrical experiences raise within them, which stimulate a spirit of inquiry and creativity to explore what may be difficult for them to understand” (Issa, 2008).

5.6. Functions of Educational Theatre

Training in speech

Educating children

Connecting physical and mental activity

Socialization

Developing good taste (Atef, 2004)

6. Reception and Theatre

The role of the theatre recipient is not limited to the act of watching; rather, it extends to shaping the interaction between the audience and what is presented on stage. Audience responses appear directly, making theatre an ideal field for studying the process of reception. Historically, the audience has been closely tied to theatrical activity. In Greek society, theatre was not separate from the social, economic, and political structures of the community. The social significance of Greek theatre is evident in the large turnout for performances, which, according to historians, were held in venues that could accommodate more than fourteen thousand spectators. This high attendance reflects the social relationships produced by theatre at that time, as it was considered a cultural event (Ben Haniche, 2021).

Theatre is an art of dialogue and vision, as revealed by the Greek origin of the word “theatre,” derived from the verb “to see.” The essential characteristic of theatrical art lies in the dynamism that encompasses all participants in a theatrical event—both those performing it and those receiving it, collectively or individually, each in their own way, as all are active spectators and producers (Ben Haniche, 2021).

The recipient’s sense that the theatrical experience they undergo is essentially a substitute experience—not their own, but a replacement for the actor’s or character’s experience—and that this substitute experience is also a shared one in which the recipient participates along with the actors, and in which other spectators also share by bearing some of its emotional or psychological weight, creates a form of dual awareness: vertical (the substitute experience) and horizontal (the shared experience). This results in a psychological depth unique to theatre reception, a kind of special performance carried out by the recipient themselves in an active and engaged manner (Ben Haniche, 2021).

7. Children's Theatre Themes in Algeria

The theatrical texts directed at children have addressed many themes and issues drawn from the surrounding environment and lived reality, with the aim of developing the child's awareness and refining their acquired skills. Among the most important themes are:

7.1. Social Themes

Children's theatre deals with social issues related to the child's world and interests. In the theatrical text, the writer expresses their point of view regarding the prevailing social conditions experienced by their society and shared with it, dramatizing them on stage. Thus, the theatrical text becomes a vessel through which the writer conveys the concerns and preoccupations of society (Qarqoua, 2009). Writers have made society a central subject, and theatre has served as a means to present its problems and concerns and attempt to address them. These plays portray social reality in a way that suits the child's level of awareness and ability to comprehend and understand the subject. They also depict the period of social change after independence. Their aim is to educate young people, steer them away from the dangers of deviance and corruption, and combat social ills. Examples of such plays include "The Racetrack of Ignorance, Alcohol, Hashish, and Gambling" by Mohammed Al-Abed Al-Jalali, and "The Trap" by Ahmed Boudchicha (Ben Ali, 2023).

7.2. School-Related and Behavioral Themes

By *school-related themes*, we mean everything connected to the school environment, such as school supplies and the importance of preserving them, the teacher and the duty of respecting them, friends and the importance of choosing them wisely, holidays and how to spend and benefit from them, and other topics related to the world of school. As for *behavioural themes*, these refer to moral aspects and the positive values that should be instilled in children (Jalouli, 2003). School-related themes, therefore, are those that have a close and direct connection to the school and everything related to it, including curricula and tools. Behavioural themes, on the other hand, are represented in the values and morals that children should embody both inside and outside the school (Ben Ali, 2023).

7.3. Religious Themes

Children's theatre has also addressed religious themes. This type was the most widespread in the early beginnings of children's theatre. The French colonial efforts to erase Algerian identity—by targeting Islam and the Arabic language—played a significant role in prompting the Association of Muslim Scholars to take an interest in children's theatre and promote it, as part of their mission to spread awareness, advocacy, and reform. They focused on religious topics in children's theatre to familiarize young audiences with the history of their ancestors, their positions, and their morals. "The Islamic children's play draws its elements and impactful situations from the rich history of Islam, filled with profound lessons, engaging stories, admirable situations, noble morals, and refined literature in its various aspects. Thus, Islamic theatre for children combines entertainment and play with good example and elevated behaviour. The various Islamic events and situations are well suited for children's works, attracting their attention through the excitement, suspense, enjoyment, inspiring Islamic situations, and the living teachings of Islam rooted in the conscience, as well as the instruction of the different religious duties prescribed by Islam" (Manna, 2014).

7.4. National and Historical Themes

Children's theatre in Algeria has also addressed national and historical themes. This was driven by various reasons and motivations. Some of these date back to the pre-independence period, such as instilling national values and fostering a revolutionary spirit

among Algerians to resist colonialism and change the painful reality. Others relate to the post-independence period, including pride in and glorification of national history by reviving it and introducing it to children (Jalouli, 2003). It has been emphasized that the material and themes of theatrical works should be drawn from the rich Arab history, filled with events and significant incidents (Ben salah, 2018). This type of theatre has a strong influence on children and plays an effective role in their educational development.

7.5. Humorous Themes

Algerian children's theatre has also addressed humorous themes. In such plays, humour may sometimes be an end in itself, and at other times a means of addressing specific social and behavioural issues (Jalouli, 2003). In essence, the humorous play seeks to engage with the child's inclinations and win their heart by presenting comic situations. At times, humour serves as a tool used by the playwright to express other purposes and values embedded within the play, through which they aim to convey their message. Humour is also sometimes employed as a way to relieve the audience from boredom, especially when they are watching purely moral or educational plays that may feel rigid or overly serious. This may serve either to protect the audience from monotony while following morally driven or didactic plays, or for a dramatic purpose—by adding a humorous spirit to a character or situation that provokes laughter (Sharaf, 1992).

8. Educational Values of Children's Theatre in Algeria

Educational values are a set of standards and guidelines that children receive and acquire within educational institutions, as well as within the family and society—either intentionally or unintentionally—through official school curricula, which directly influence their behaviour, or through the norms and laws that govern the family and society. They are also defined as “a set of firmly rooted cognitive, emotional, and behavioural beliefs and perceptions held by the individual and society, which are conveyed through the events and characters in the plays presented in children's theatre” (Majid, 2016).

The educational values embedded in children's theatre represent a system of standards, facts, values, skills, and experiences that positively contribute to improving and refining a child's life and promoting its development. It also works to prepare conditions, activities, and abilities that instil moral values and proper behaviour in children in their interactions with themselves and others. From this perspective, children's theatre did not emerge randomly or merely for entertainment and passing time; rather, it is an educational tool and an important medium for transmitting and promoting everything that is successful, beneficial, and useful in building generations (Ben Ali, 2023).

Thus, children's theatre can be considered as a branch of Education (education and teaching), as it is an educational activity that complements other activities through the presentation of purposeful ideas, meaningful images, and informative and ethical topics that contribute to the creative educational process. We also observe a strong relationship between children's theatre and society. Theatre primarily targets the child, who is an essential element and the cornerstone of building society. Instilling positive values in children reflects positively on their psychological energy, strengthens their personality, reduces hesitation and fear, and directly contributes to shaping a better child, a better adult, and ultimately a better society (Ben Ali, 2023).

Among the educational values found in children's theatre in Algeria are:

- Educational values with a religious dimension
- Educational values with a national and patriotic dimension

- Educational values with a social dimension
- Educational values with an educational (instructional) dimension
- Educational values with a humorous dimension

As an example, we will address educational values with a social dimension:

Social values are considered implicit guiding principles that direct individuals and institutions within society to behave appropriately within the social system. These values are gradually formed within society and become integrated into people's lives, shaping general behaviour that ensures peaceful coexistence among individuals. Social values also establish boundaries between right and wrong, what is legal and illegal (and thus punishable), as well as what is acceptable and what is undesirable. Although these values are often implicit, some of them are explicitly codified into laws so that members of society clearly understand their limits (Ben Ali, 2023).

There are many educational plays for children in Algeria that address social values, including: "The Dangers of Ignorance, Alcohol, Hashish, and Gambling" by Mohamed El Abed El Jalali; "Bread and Dust" by Abdelwahab Hakki; "The Real Mother" and "The Mother" by Azzedine Djelloudji; and others (Ben Ali, 2023). We will focus on "The Dangers of Ignorance, Alcohol, Hashish, and Gambling," which depicts the social dimensions of life in Algeria during the colonial period. - "The Dangers of Ignorance, Alcohol, Hashish, and Gambling" (Murtad, 1983).

It is an educational and social school play consisting of four acts, addressing various social issues related to the harms of ignorance, alcohol, gambling, and hashish. It is considered the first prose play written in Classical Arabic, as noted by Murtad (1983), who stated that it is "the first prose play written in Classical Arabic that we have been able to access, representing an early phase of theatrical art" (Murtad, 1983). The play was written by Mohamed El Abed El Jalali before World War II in Constantine, when he was a teacher at the School of Education there. This text remained buried and unknown for a long time (Murtad, 1983). Regarding the characters of the play, the author chose his protagonists from both the world of children and adults, assigning the main roles to children who defended goodness and virtue, and offered educational advice and guidance aimed at reforming both the individual and society (Ben Ali, 2023).

9. Partial Analysis of the Play

The play addressed several social values that were widespread in Algerian society, namely ignorance, gambling, hashish, and alcohol. Since the play was produced in the 1930s, during the period of French colonial rule, it is evident that French colonial policy had achieved many of its objectives following the occupation of Algeria. Among these objectives were the spread of ignorance, Christianization, and the promotion of vice, alcohol, and drugs. The play reflects the reality of Algerians across different social groups—elders, adults, youth, and children—during the period of French occupation (Ben Ali, 2023).

The author begins with ignorance, which is considered the most dangerous affliction affecting human beings, as knowledge represents the spiritual nourishment of man and is the means through which one attains intellectual perfection and higher status. Consequently, the education sector in Algeria was among the most targeted by restrictions and confiscation by the French administration. It deliberately undermined education in Algeria, as its goal from the outset was to keep the Algerian people ignorant, spread illiteracy among them, impose the French language, and eliminate the Arabic language. The education system was exploited as a tool to implement colonial policies, with the introduction of difficult programs and conditions

aimed at replacing Arabic with French. In one of its reports from 1847, France stated: “Algeria will not become French until our French language becomes a national language...” (Amara, 1982).

Children were not spared from French colonial policy, especially in their early stages of development, when they have a greater capacity and readiness for learning and growth. If a child does not acquire their mother tongue, they may develop a fragmented personality.

An example of this is found at the beginning of the play:

Student: What are you doing here, my brothers? (One of them replies sarcastically)

Boy (1): Are we your brothers? You are far from us, and there is no kinship between us.

Student: Yes, what you say is true; there is no kinship between us... but there is something stronger and more solid than kinship that unites us.

Boy (1): And what is that?

Student: It is Islam! It is the strong bond and firm connection that unites Arabs and non-Arabs, whites and blacks, and people of the East and the West. It is the strongest bond and the firmest connection.

Boy: We are ignorant of this!

Student: You are ignorant of this? How strange your situation is! (Murtad, 1983)

Here, we observe that the author, through this passage, seeks to promote unity and cohesion rather than division and fragmentation. He attempts to instil this value in children, presenting this excerpt as a lesson in brotherhood, where Islam is portrayed as a strong bond uniting Arabs and non-Arabs, as well as the East and the West (Ben Ali, 2023).

Among the excerpts that reflect the highest levels of ignorance and children’s lack of awareness of the importance and purpose of school is the following:

Student: Why have you not enrolled in school to learn there?

Boy (1): What is school? And what would I learn there? (Murtad, 1983)

In another excerpt, the reliance of parents on their children for assistance, and their decision not to send them to school—thus abandoning education—is illustrated in the following passage:

Student: And you, what has prevented you from attending school?

Boy (2): Herding goats and sheep; my father orders me to do that every day!

Student: And you, what has kept you from studying at school?

Boy (3): I am an orphan; my father died and left me very young. He did not leave us enough to live on—my siblings and I—so my mother sends me to sell eggs and oranges to travellers. I bring her some money so she can spend it on my brothers (Murtad, 1983).

Here, the harsh circumstances that prevented children from attending school become evident. There are many other excerpts that reflect similar situations in which children became victims of the difficult conditions in which they lived. However, the author did not overlook highlighting the importance of school in this play. One of the passages that illustrates this is the following:

Student: School is the life of nations! School is the only hope of a mother in refining and educating her child. A nation without schools is a dead nation, even if it appears to be alive and walking on earth! True life is the life of the mind and the spirit, not merely the life of the body. The members of such a nation are like animals: they eat and live without thinking or reflection until death overtakes them. School teaches you your religion, your language, and

your duties toward your Lord, your brothers, and your homeland, and prepares you to become an active member of your society (Murtad, 1983).

This passage shows the student's attempt to convince both the children and their parents, serving as a compelling argument that enlightens them about the path of knowledge. In fact, he succeeds in persuading the father of the first boy to allow his son to attend school.

This play addresses multiple educational themes and includes passages that align with the child's level of thinking and age, offering numerous pieces of advice and guidance. What we have discussed here represents only a small part of it; therefore, the play is rich in constructive educational values aimed at shaping the child's behaviour and morals.

As another example of educational values, the writer Jellaouji (2008) sought to embody and present the value of honesty in his play "*The Black Wallet*." Through this work, he addresses this theme, as the child Saeed returns the wallet he found in the street to its owner after listening to his father's advice and learning that admitting one's mistake is a virtue.

However, at first, his inner self urged him to keep it and not return it. He even attempted to bribe his friend Salem to keep his secret and not inform anyone. This is illustrated in the dialogue that took place between them:

Salem: (greeting his friend) "Peace be upon you, Saeed."

Saeed: (stammering) "And peace be upon you, Salem." (He hides the wallet in his pocket.)

Salem: "What are you hiding from me?"

Saeed: (fearfully) "N-no... nothing, my friend."

Salem: "I am your friend, and I have never hidden anything from you."

Saeed: "Do you promise not to reveal my secret to anyone?"

Salem: "Alright."

Saeed: "I found a wallet—here it is." (He shows it to him.)

Salem: "It's nice for one of us to have money, but do you know its owner?"

Saeed: "Yes, I know him. It fell from him without him noticing, so I picked it up."

Salem: "And what will you do with it now? Will you return it to him?"

Saeed: "No, I will not return it. I will take what I want from it, then put it back where I found it."

Salem: "Saeed, this is unacceptable." (Boulk'ibat, 2021)

This scene suggests that the writer aimed to convey an educational value that encourages children to reject cheating and theft and to stay away from such behaviors. However, it also reveals the contradictory and changeable nature of human behavior. This is illustrated through the dialogue between Saeed and his friend Salem, who changes his position regarding returning the wallet as soon as Saeed tempts him with a sum of money from it in exchange for keeping his secret and concealing his actions.

Saeed: "I will give you whatever you want if you stay silent and do not reveal the secret."
(The bell rings, announcing the break, and the two friends head to the classroom.)

Saeed: (while opening the wallet) "Here, Salem, take it all—it's yours."

Salem: (happily) "You truly are a loyal friend, Saeed. Thank you very much."

Saeed: "No need to thank me, but keep my secret." (Boulk'ibat, 2021)

Children's theatre seeks to enable the child to engage with life and reality through a cognitive and cultural perspective, by means of the various themes it addresses. It requires the treatment of life's problems in a clear manner, along with the simplicity of the solutions and ideas suggested by theatrical texts (Ismail, 2004).

It also raises various themes, including the conflict between good and evil that stems from human nature. This duality, arising from life itself, represents a moral issue that the child must struggle to confront. The triumph of virtue over vice, and of good over evil at the end of the play, reinforces the child's moral inclination—especially when the child identifies with the hero who strives for goodness. In doing so, the child shares the hero's ideas and struggles until the goal is achieved. This, in turn, fosters a kind of emotional empathy between the child and the hero, who embodies a balanced and virtuous nature (Boulk'ibat, 2021).

The aim of this play is to teach children how to preserve honesty and the importance of returning what belongs to others, as failing to do so is considered theft.

There are also many educational plays, among which we can mention the play "*Salem and the Devil*," which addresses the theme of knowledge and its role in human life. It consists of several characters: the narrator, Salem the lazy (the protagonist), the father, the mother, the teacher, and Salem's classmate. The play is composed of seven scenes and revolves around the conflict between good and evil, which the writer expresses through the character of Salem, the lazy boy. It also presents various everyday situations such as smoking, education, laziness, and engaging in inappropriate behaviours like writing on desks, damaging them, and showing disrespect toward the teacher. The play serves as a lesson for children, encouraging them to always choose what benefits them. Good ultimately prevails in the end, while evil is portrayed as the voice that incites wrongdoing. It also aims to raise children's awareness of the importance of knowledge and its role in shaping an individual's personality and elevating their status, while urging them to avoid negative behaviours such as laziness and smoking (Jellaouji, 2008).

The Algerian writer and university professor Azzedine Jellaouji (2008) is considered among the authors who have made a significant contribution in this field, having written approximately forty plays for children—some educational and others instructional—in order to help build future generations and instil positive values and ethics.

From an artistic and aesthetic perspective, the structure of children's theatre in these examples is based on a set of dramatic elements that contribute to achieving its educational purpose. At the level of dramatic construction, plays—such as "*The Dangers of Ignorance, Alcohol, Hashish, and Gambling*"—rely on a simple and progressive plot that begins with the presentation of a problem (ignorance or social deviance), develops through a series of dialogic situations, and concludes with a clear moral resolution in which good triumphs over evil. This linear structure aligns with children's cognitive abilities, making it easier for them to follow events and understand the message.

In terms of characters, the playwright It relies on standard models (typified characters), such as the aware child who represents reason and knowledge, in contrast to the ignorant or deviant child who embodies negative behaviour. Despite their simplicity, these characters perform a clear educational function, allowing the child to identify with the positive model and reject the negative one. However, this typification may sometimes limit the psychological depth of the characters, making them closer to instructional tools than to complex dramatic figures.

Regarding dialogue, it is characterized by clarity and directness, with a predominantly didactic and instructive tone. The language used is formal yet simplified to suit the child's level, but it often tends toward explicitness, presenting values directly rather than through symbolism or suggestion. Nevertheless, dialogue remains a central element in conveying ideas, especially through question-and-answer patterns that stimulate the child's thinking.

As for dramatic conflict, it is mainly represented by the struggle between good and evil, or between knowledge and ignorance. This conflict is both external and internal. Such a form is appropriate for children's theatre, as it reflects a clear moral duality that helps instil values, although it may sometimes lack the complexity that enriches the aesthetic experience.

In terms of the aesthetic dimension, these plays tend to employ simple scenographic elements (such as set design, costumes, and movement), with a primary focus on performance and dialogue as the main means of influence. The predominance of the educational aspect may at times affect the artistic value, as the aesthetic dimension is occasionally overshadowed by the didactic message.

Accordingly, it can be said that the artistic structure of Algerian children's theatre effectively fulfils its educational function. However, it still requires further aesthetic and artistic development through diversifying expressive techniques, deepening characterization, and incorporating symbolism and imagination. This would help achieve a balance between entertainment and education, and transform the child into an active participant rather than merely a passive recipient of ready-made messages.

10. Conclusion

This study highlights that reception in educational theatre directed at children constitutes a crucial element in achieving the pedagogical and aesthetic objectives of theatrical work. It plays an effective role in constructing meaning and developing the child's cognitive and emotional capacities. The child is not a passive recipient, but an active participant who interprets theatrical discourse according to their experiences and psychological and cognitive characteristics, making the reception process dynamic and continuously evolving. The study also demonstrates that the success of educational theatre depends on the extent to which it takes into account the specific nature of the child as a recipient. This is achieved through simplifying the dramatic structure, employing clear and engaging expressive elements, and adopting interactive methods that enhance the child's participation. Moreover, reception cannot be separated from the cultural and educational context in which the child develops, making it a relative process influenced by environment and experience.

Based on these findings, the study recommends the development of theatrical texts that are appropriate to children's developmental stages, the reinforcement of interactive dimensions in performances, and the provision of pedagogical and psychological training for those involved in children's theatre, in order to ensure the achievement of the intended educational goals. The study also opens prospects for future research on reception in light of digital transformations, particularly in exploring ways to integrate modern media into enhancing the experience of educational theatre for children.

Within this framework, educational theatre remains a promising space for shaping the child's personality and developing their awareness, provided that there is a deep understanding of reception mechanisms and their effective application within the theatrical process.

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