



## RESEARCH ARTICLE

## The Diversity in the Reception of Children's Theatre Performances As Exemplified by the Play "the Eight Days of the Week"

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Received: May 18, 2024 Accepted: Jul 13, 2024	Children's theatre is one of the most pivotal educational approaches in shaping a child's personality and behavior, as it serves as a primary channel in the process of reception. Its spaces engage children's perceptions and appeal to their minds through a colorful visual method, while also delivering a noble message grounded in ethical principles, leading to the attainment of education, knowledge, entertainment, and cultural enrichment. The core research issue revolves around the following question: What is the diversity in the reception of children's theatre performances (exemplified by the play "The Eight Days of the Week")? The theoretical framework includes two sections: the first discusses the concept of reception in theatre performances, and the second addresses children's theatre. The third chapter presents the research methodology, while the fourth chapter displays the research results and a series of conclusions. The study concludes with the sources.
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### CHAPTER ONE

#### First: The Research Problem

Human ideologies have been centered around rhetorical activities related to the process of reception in response to surrounding variables since the dawn of creation. As an interactive being, man responds to influences and phenomena, constantly seeking a communicative language to convey his experiences, motivations, and needs to others. This pursuit has led to the establishment of societies with their own unique and diverse methods of reception. Movement and sound have formed the fundamental structures of their ideas and served as the means to convey messages and meanings. Human history has provided multiple insights that have shaped the art of theatre, relying on the dynamics of reception as a primary form of communication. This essential mode of expression has contributed to various intellectual and social transformations, forming the bedrock of ancient civilizations through shapes, movements, and rituals representing deities, myths, and ceremonial acts, thereby giving rise to the earliest forms of theatre.

Engagement in children's theatre is among the most crucial methods for conveying meaningful messages, creating a connection between reception, education, and enjoyment, which is essential for the process of reception. It plays a significant role in shaping and developing a child's personality by providing an educational environment and aesthetic space that stimulates their auditory and visual perceptions, enhancing their mental, psychological, and physical attributes. Moreover, children's

theatre aids learners by equipping them with methods that instill behavioral and educational values, thereby contributing to the child's character development. Children are influenced and interact through the process of reception, where specific symbols, meanings, and techniques are artistically and aesthetically presented within the theatre space. Thus, the reception between theatre and the child creates an impact on the learner's psychological, social, and educational aspects through an artistic, aesthetic, and entertaining formulation. Given the child's developmental stage and limited experience, they are more susceptible to surrounding changes than an adult, highlighting the importance of nurturing children and instilling values and behaviors that shape their perceptions correctly through diverse reception methods.

Based on the foregoing, the researcher identifies the research problem as centered on answering the following question: What is the diversity in the reception of children's theatre performances, exemplified by the play "The Eight Days of the Week"?

### **Second: Importance of the Research**

The importance of the research can be summarized as follows:

1. Children's theatre contributes to the transmission of constructive societal experiences and the communication of educational values and ideas to child audiences.
2. It may benefit graduate students and specialists in theatrical arts and art education within (Colleges and Institutes of Fine Arts).
3. It enriches the artistic library in the fields of (art education and theatre) with a methodical analytical study on the diversity in the reception of children's theatre performances.

### **Third: Research Objective**

The current research aims to explore the diversity in the reception of children's theatre performances, exemplified by the play "The Eight Days of the Week".

### **Fourth: Research Boundaries**

1. Spatial boundaries: The National Theatre.
2. Temporal boundaries: 2017-2018.
3. Subject boundaries: A study of the diversity in the reception of children's theatre.

### **Fifth: Research Terms**

#### **1. Engagement:**

\* Defined by Alexander Dean as "a theatrical term referring to movement associated with the use of a theatrical tool or a specific pantomime action, which can occur during dialogue or when dialogue flow pauses. These theatrical engagements may go unnoticed or may be performed with clear focus, making the viewer fully aware of them" (Dean, Alexander, 1972, p. 68).

\* Defined by Jalaluddin as "the thought that penetrates material with difficulty" (Jalaluddin Said, 1994, p. 258).

\* In Ali Hussein Reda Beqly's doctoral dissertation, it is described as "the ability to utilize all performative energy (physical and vocal) and employ all material techniques in theatrical exercises to ensure their interaction serves the theatrical performance" (Beqly, Ali Hussein Reda, 2013, p. 6).

Procedurally, the researcher defines engagement as:

The ability to utilize kinetic and vocal energy in service of the actor's body as a theatrical tool, stimulating the perceptions of the audience within the children's theatre space.

## **2. Reception:**

\* Defined by Al-Ansari as "acceptance or agreement, or an idea accepted without indicators of its truth, or the act of receiving, or the state of being received, or the manner of reception" (Al-Ansari, Hussein, 1997, p. 8).

\* Jauss defines it as "a theory concerned with understanding, not just reading; it views understanding, rather than reading or interpreting symbols and codes, as a functional process that actively contributes to meaning construction" (Nawal Ibrahim, 2001, p. 78).

\* Pavlen defines it as "a tangible communicative stance that must include a description of neural and aesthetic processes and the social differences in the process of sending indications, considering the various expectations and intellectual models of the receiver" (Al-Ansari, Hussein, 1997, p. 7).

Procedurally, the researcher defines reception as:

A human activity based on a set of communicative relational interactions between the meaning sender (performer) and the child learner (receiver) of indicative messages, where structural and textual elements transform into visual experiences through the perceptual activity of the receiver.

## **3. Children's Theatre:**

Defined by Abdul Kareem as "theatre that addresses topics relevant to children, with an audience primarily composed of children, sometimes accompanied by adults. This theatre possesses certain characteristics distinguishing it from adult theatre, whether in themes, design, or other aspects" (Atiya Abdul Kareem, 1979, p. 25).

Defined by Faten Jumaa as "theatre that presents educational, ethical, and knowledge-based values in an entertaining format tailored for children, considering their cognitive abilities. Children are categorized into three age groups (6-9 years, 9-12 years, and 12-15 years). Specialists and professionals in administrative, intellectual, and psychological aspects of childhood participate in its operations. Whether the actors are professionals or amateurs, children or adults, they must interact with the message intended for children and possess the capability to achieve the performance's objectives" (Faten Jumaa Saadoun, 2001, p. 7).

Defined by Abdel Fattah as "a part of adult theatre, generally sharing its characteristics but differing in the level of the text, the type of actors, and the goals and ideas" (Abdel Fattah Abu Maal, 1984, p. 27).

Defined by Rodenberg as "theatre that presents to children what is suitable for their ages, bringing joy to their hearts while simultaneously nurturing their sense of heroism, nobility, and love for goodness and beauty" (Youssef Abdul Tawab, 1967, p. 24).

Procedurally, the researcher defines children's theatre as:

One of the most crucial types of theatre that contributes to shaping a child's personality and refining their thoughts. It possesses an entertaining style performed by a professional troupe of adult actors before an audience of children, according to their developmental stages. It aims to stimulate the child's auditory and visual perceptions and instill sound ideologies within the child.

## **CHAPTER TWO — THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **Section One: The Concept of Reception in Theatrical Performance**

The theory of reception marked the first shift in intellectual paradigms distinct from previous critical theories that offered interpretations of textual meanings. Modern reception theory is tied to the experiences of the audience and their role in the response process. Thus, "reception theory concerns

itself with the dialectical relationship between reading awareness and the audience, providing varying personal responses based on the cumulative experiences and knowledge of the audience, seeking the essence of meaning and transforming it into dialogical spaces with diverse and renewed aesthetic engagements. This leads to a reception rooted in a continually evolving aesthetic awareness through the audience's sensory and aesthetic appreciation, forming a text shaped by a sequence of readings that transform subjects into aesthetic experiences, contributing to a renewed accumulation of reading experiences" (Al-Janabi, Qais, 2002, p. 16).

Reception theory relies on the concept of "intentionality or the feeling of intentionality or immediacy, relating to the existential moment. Meaning is not formed through experience, previous calculations, and data or deterministic criteria but through self-understanding and immediate intentionality. Consequently, pre-existing assumptions generating understanding are dismissed, and a cognitive system for perceiving phenomena is built, based on (the self)" (Bashra Musa Saleh, 2001, p. 35).

The reception process within the theatrical performance framework is one of the primary objectives of the performance. Reception involves diverse engagements influenced by personal accumulations, education, culture, and other surrounding variables. Within the performance space, reception revolves around artistic directions starting from the actor, scenography, and all stage elements. Each component within the performance space plays a role in the reception process. The reciprocal relationship between the audience and the performance's diverse and varied discourses is determined by the audience's cultural and intellectual background and the nature of practical proportions. The reception strategy is conditioned by the actor's performance, as a pivotal sender, along with the textual discourse and the impact of the directorial approach with all its artistic and scenographic elements, enhancing the intellectual and aesthetic value (Al-Asam, Basim, 2000, p. 132).

In children's theatre, the child's reception is achieved through the visual and auditory images they see and hear. Children's theatre carries a more critical discourse than adult theatre because children, being in a developmental stage, respond to and interact with events immediately, constantly expressing and changing. Therefore, the researcher finds that the focal point of reception stems from diverse engagements to elicit the child's response and stimulate their sensory perceptions. Visual, auditory, and kinetic monotony causes the child to lose focus and become distracted from the main objective. The theatrical performance is based on proposed goals tailored to the child's psychological and social particularities. To achieve aesthetic reception and response in children, diverse engagements should include:

- "Focusing on a single main character in the play for easy follow-up and understanding.
- Simplicity and clarity of the story, with the performance featuring humorous situations.
- Entering the objectives immediately after the curtain rises.
- Using beautiful movements and elements of comprehensive theatre, including rhythmic movements, dance, and songs.
- Employing theatrical techniques such as lighting, music, sound effects, costumes, makeup, and decor aesthetically" (Sharouni, Yaqoub, 1993, p. 71).

This underscores the necessity of "developing the actor's body to establish a close relationship with scenography within the theatrical performance. This relationship is harmonious and integrated to produce the visual image. The visual image, in its aesthetic concept, is a composite art form of directorial technique and scenographic elements. The actor enjoys considerable freedom for expressive movement, unleashing their imaginative creativity" (Jawad Al-Hasib, 2015, pp. 49-50).

## **Section Two: Children's Theatre**

Children's theatre plays a pivotal role in shaping the psychological and behavioral development of the young learner. It activates their sensory perceptions and leaves a lasting impact on their personality development. Children's theatre "aims to engage the intellect first, allowing the child to think and then encouraging them to take a stance on what they see without neglecting elements of enjoyment and spectacle. These elements are employed along with the overall elements of the performance to guide the child in the right direction and help them learn how to interact with problems they might encounter" (Al-Hindawi, Hind Mohammad Musaddaq Abdul Hamid, 2005, p. 10).

Children's theatre is "a theatre that seeks to deliver a noble message based on ethical and aesthetic foundations, aiming to achieve education, knowledge, entertainment, and cultural enrichment. It encompasses elements such as illusion, imagination, immersion, empathy, and emotion. It can be said that children's theatre is one of the effective mediums in developing children intellectually, emotionally, aesthetically, morally, and culturally" (Dhekra Abdul Sahib Abadi, 2009, p. 65).

Furthermore, children's theatre "provides its young audience with information by embedding it within a dramatic aesthetic framework that aligns with the child's perceptions. It is essential to consider the stages of childhood according to age groups, as well as the craftsmanship and fundamentals of theatre, including lighting, decor, accessories, and costumes. In this realm, children's theatre achieves two primary goals: creating a need for theatre among children and developing their appreciation" (Al-Humairi, Kazem Jabbar Sultan, 2005, p. 52).

Children's theatre is fundamental in shaping a child's ideologies, utilizing visual imagery to convey and organize experiences sequentially to foster cognitive growth and alter behavior in alignment with educational goals and diverse engagement in the reception process. "The child's interest and engagement with the performance stem from the director's ability to capture dramatic values and present them in an artistically appealing and captivating manner for the child. This involves immersing the child in the performance and convincing them of its authenticity and realism within the theatrical framework, assuming the audience attends the performance with some level of belief that what they will experience is significant and genuine within the performance's temporal and spatial boundaries" (Habib, Dhaher Habib, 2013, p. 19). This approach instills in the child "the courage and drive towards self-development and social and cultural motivation, shaping their personality and independence in a creatively and innovatively free environment provided by the theatre. Consequently, theatre reaches the educational, social, and cultural value, artistically and stylistically crafted to match the child's understanding, imagination, and cognitive needs" (Sadiq Wali Salman, 2023, p. 72).

Children within the age range of kindergarten to middle school should view theatre as a domain where artistic and aesthetic influences interact, much like material and spiritual influences in their environment. This enhances their nature, refines their character, and develops positive needs, interests, and goals. The need for artistic and aesthetic enjoyment ultimately contributes to nurturing other values and cognitive needs, such as seeking empathy, support, affection, pleasure, contemplation, love for change, self-respect, self-control, and self-defense" (Aqil Mehdi, 2014, p. 5).

Children's theatre aims to "develop the child's aesthetic sense and improve their appreciation of various arts. Educational theatrical performances extend beyond acting to include scenery, painting, decoration, music, rhythmic movements, and other combined arts in the performance, in addition to the literary aspect of storytelling and dialogue, enhancing the child's expressive abilities. This, in turn, fosters the child's aesthetic taste" (Al-Humairi, Kazem Jabbar Sultan, 2005, pp. 51-52). This confirms that a child's reception of mental images and behavioral, social, and psychological changes stems from multiple engagements capable of stimulating their senses, achieving a duality of "educational and psychological guidance in a way that combines enjoyment and benefit, delivering culture and

literature to children. Therefore, it shares with adult theatre the role of carrying the educational message to society, but children's theatre is more specialized because it deals with a significant and broad segment of society" (Al-Tai, Sadiq Abdul Sahib Mohammad, 2017, p. 11).

The key characteristics of the theatrical performance presented to children, which align with the developmental stage of the child, include:

1. **Clarity**: "Careful character depiction should emphasize the tangible visual aspects, aligning with a child's sensory thinking style. Characters appear vividly sculpted in form, color, and all their material traits in the child's imagination, as if alive and animated before their eyes."
2. **Distinctiveness**: "Characters should avoid similarity in names, qualities, or some attributes, preventing confusion in the child's imagination. This necessitates keeping the number of characters within the child's capacity for memory and comprehension. Preferably, a children's play should feature a single principal character grappling with spiritual, mental, or social crises, with dialogue that is swift, imaginative, and rich in theatrical artistry."
3. **Engagement**: "This entails selecting characters that captivate children, whether they are animals, real-life heroes, or beloved figures in the children's world."

Indicators derived from the theoretical framework:

1. The aesthetic reception process for children revolves around diverse engagements:
  - Focusing on a single key character in the play for ease of follow-up and understanding.
  - Narrative simplicity and clarity, with characterization through humorous situations.
  - Directly addressing goals after curtain rise.
  - Utilization of motion, gestures, rhythmic movements, dance, and songs.
  - Employment of theatrical techniques such as lighting, music, sound effects, costumes, makeup, and décor for aesthetic enhancement.
2. The reciprocal relationship between the audience and the presentation's discourse, in its various forms, is determined by the audience's cultural and cognitive capital and the quality of the applied measures.
3. Reception strategy is conditioned by the actor's performance as a central transmitter, alongside textual discourse, and the directorial approach with all its artistic and scenographic elements, accelerating the escalation of intellectual and aesthetic value.
4. The key features of the theatrical performance delivered to children, aligning with developmental stages, are clarity, distinctiveness, and engagement.
5. The actor's vocal performance must not merely relay events or dialogue but should profoundly impact the reception process and the audience's self-perception. This impact is shaped through verbal language, the harmonious modulation of voice tones, and their integration with the actor's body, forming a communicative tool between the actor's performance and the audience.
6. The presence of scenography in the presentation constitutes a significant aspect of its visual impact, providing it with performative dynamism and a sensory-evocative aesthetic discourse that profoundly affects the audience. This interaction creates a diverse artistic engagement with significant aesthetic value in the reception process.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Research Methodology and Procedures

#### Firstly: Research Methodology

The researcher will present the research methodology starting from the research community and its sample. The researcher adopted the descriptive-analytical approach in her study for its alignment with the research path and objective.

#### Secondly: Research Community

To determine the research community, the researcher conducted a survey study and collected information to catalog theatrical presentations by investigating the archives of the National Theater, respecting the boundaries of her research for the period (2017-2018).

#### Thirdly: Research Sample

The research sample consisted of (1) theatrical production deliberately chosen as a model for the study, aligning with the characteristics and objectives of the research based on the following justifications:

1. Availability of DVD recordings of the production.
2. Direct observation of the production by the researcher.
3. Compliance of the production conditions with the research objectives and goals.

**Table 1: Illustrates the research sample**

<b>The location.</b>	<b>The year of the performance</b>	<b>The director's name</b>	<b>The play's name</b>
The National Theater	2017	Aqbal Naeem	Days of the Eight Week

#### Fourth: Research Tools

To achieve the current research goal of exploring the reception diversity in children's theater productions (Days of the Eight Week as a case study), the researcher utilized theoretical indicators in her analysis tools.

#### Fifth: Sample Analysis

Play: Days of the Eight Week

Written by: Salah Hassan

Directed by: Aqbal Naeem

Duration: 55 minutes

#### Performance Analysis:

This production delivered a performance rich in symbolism, structured around movement and sound. The director utilized scenography, particularly focusing on lighting, to enhance the aesthetic and stylistic aspects of the events. Visual imagery emphasized ideas and their interaction with the stage props. The rhythmic sound played a pivotal role, supporting the actors as they entered the stage. The director highlighted color formation in the reception process, creating visually appealing scenes that fostered an atmosphere of joy and vitality, engaging children actively with the events. The theatrical

director focused on the symbolic meanings of color and light, which significantly influenced the child viewer's perception, capturing their attention and stimulating their cognitive awareness.



The intellectual content presented by this production through its handling of the environment, use of scenography, and creation of a beautiful atmosphere linked closely to the psychological state portrayed by the characters. The visual imagery harmonized lighting elements and color usage within the presentation framework, achieving a visual aesthetic that stimulated sensory perceptions, both auditory and visual. The reception process relied on mental imagery and imaginative structure, invoking natural forms subjected to humanization processes involving rhythmic repetition and exaggeration. Significantly, its characters heavily relied on visual imagery and the shapes produced in the reception process conveying meaningful themes, aiding in stimulating the child viewer's response to the scenic image and interaction with the play's progression. The sensory implications positively influenced the child's behaviors, expressions, movements, and gestures during the performance. The vocal performance greatly contributed to fostering mutual relations in the reception process between the child and their ideologies, significantly shaping the aesthetics of costumes, attracting attention, ensuring enjoyment, and creating an atmosphere of fun, excitement, and joy within the performance space. The harmonious interaction of lighting with costumes effectively engaged the child viewer's sensory faculties, activating educational aspects that assisted the child in viewing the theatrical production.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### Results

1. Significant utilization of rhythmic movements, dance, and musical compositions in the play prominently contributed to an engaging reception process.
2. The interactive nature between the audience and the varied discourse formats of the presentation significantly delineated the cultural and cognitive impact on the audience, evident through their responses to the visual discourse.



3. There was substantial alignment of performance with auditory and visual formats, enhancing the reception of meaningful content and contributing to vivid depictions of the time and place within the play, thereby enhancing its explanatory power.

4. The performance attributes of the theatrical character presented to children were distinctly clear, distinguished, and intriguing, aptly suited to the developmental stages of young audiences, significantly enriching their engagement in the reception process.

5. There was considerable responsiveness in the reception process among children, facilitated greatly by focusing on the primary character of the play, making it easier for them to follow and understand.

6. The narrative's simplicity, clarity, and inclusion of humorous situations, coupled with direct engagement with objectives immediately after the curtain rises, provided an explanatory power to the play's meaningful content and elicited an attentive response in the reception process.

7. The effective use of theatrical techniques such as lighting, music, sound effects, costumes, makeup, and decor aesthetically enhanced the creation of vivid imagery and a beautiful spatial environment, transporting children beyond familiar visual settings and stimulating their perceptions and responses in the reception process.

### **THE CONCLUSION:**

The focal point of reception stems from the diversity of engagement to elicit responses from children and stimulate their sensory perceptions—auditory and visual. Visual, auditory, and kinesthetic monotony and scenic repetition detract children from focusing and distract them from the main objective. Thus, the theatrical performance is founded on proposed objectives concerning the psychological and social specificity of children .1

The modern process of reception has been intertwined with the experiences of the audience and their role in the response process. Thus, reception theory has focused on a dialectical relationship between reader awareness and audience, manifesting in diverse personal responses that vary based on accumulated experiences and knowledge possessed by the audience. .2

The child's reception of mental images, behavioral variables, and social and psychological changes originates from several engagements capable of stimulating their senses. This achieves a dual educational and psychological direction that combines enjoyment and educational benefit, aiming to convey culture and etiquette to children, which is paramount in the function of this theater. .3

The reception process engages in diverse activities influenced by personal accumulations, educational factors, cultural influences, and other surrounding variables. Within the theatrical space, reception revolves around artistic directions starting from the actor and the scenography, encompassing all elements of the stage. Each component within the stage setting plays a role in the reception process. .4

The actor's performance dictates the strategy of reception as a central transmitter alongside the textual discourse. The directorial approach, combined with its artistic and scenographic elements, accelerates the escalation of intellectual and aesthetic values. .5

The reception process, in terms of the actor's performance, relies on their ability to respond and harmonize with the entirety of the stage setting. Being the primary conduit for textual structure, the actor requires awareness in their operational mechanics to achieve visual discourse. Any shortcomings in performance within the theatrical system can lead to a failure in conveying the semantic meaning effectively. .6

The more adaptable and physically fit the actor's body, the more capable they are of harnessing their physical energy within the theatrical space to achieve clear interpretations in its nuances.

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