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**Impact of Theater Arts Participation on High School  
Students**

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## Impact of Theater Arts Participation on High School Students

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### Abstract

**Purpose:** The aim of the study was to assess the impact of theater arts participation on high school students.

**Materials and Methods:** This study adopted a desk methodology. A desk study research design is commonly known as secondary data collection. This is basically collecting data from existing resources preferably because of its low cost advantage as compared to a field research. Our current study looked into already published studies and reports as the data was easily accessed through online journals and libraries.

**Findings:** Participation in theater arts has been shown to enhance students' academic performance, with improvements in reading comprehension, verbal skills, and overall academic achievement. This is attributed to the discipline, memorization, and comprehension skills that theater activities demand. Additionally, involvement in theater arts fosters critical thinking and creativity, encouraging students to approach problems and situations from multiple perspectives and think outside the box. Beyond academics, theater arts participation positively affects students' social and emotional development. It helps

build self-confidence and self-esteem as students perform in front of audiences and receive feedback on their work. Theater also promotes teamwork and collaboration, as students must work closely with their peers to produce successful performances. This collaborative environment helps students develop strong communication skills and a sense of empathy, as they must understand and convey different characters' emotions and motivations.

**Implications to Theory, Practice and Policy:** Constructivist learning theory, social learning theory and arts integration theory may be used to anchor future studies on assessing the impact of theater arts participation on high school students. In practice, schools should actively incorporate theater arts into core academic subjects through interdisciplinary projects that promote creative expression alongside academic learning. From a policy perspective, it is crucial for educational policymakers to prioritize funding for arts education programs, recognizing their significant role in enhancing academic performance.

**Keywords:** *Theater, Arts, Participation, High School, Students*

## INTRODUCTION

The impact of theater arts participation on high school students encompasses a multifaceted array of benefits that contribute to their overall development and academic performance. USA and Japan shows varied trends influenced by technological advancements and educational reforms. In the USA, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) reports that the average reading scores for 8th graders improved from 265 in 2015 to 267 in 2019, demonstrating a steady upward trend. However, disparities persist, particularly among minority and low-income students. In Japan, the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) results indicate a consistent performance in science and mathematics, with students scoring an average of 527 and 528 respectively in 2018, placing Japan among the top-performing countries globally. These statistics highlight the impact of educational policies and societal factors on student outcomes in developed economies (Johnson, 2021).

UK has also seen significant academic achievements, with the average GCSE (General Certificate of Secondary Education) scores improving, reflecting effective educational interventions. According to the UK's Department for Education, the average Attainment 8 score per pupil increased from 44.2 in 2018 to 46.7 in 2020. Despite these improvements, challenges such as educational inequality and resource allocation continue to affect overall performance. The trends in these developed countries underscore the importance of continuous investment in education and addressing socio-economic disparities to enhance academic outcomes (Smith, 2020).

Brazil and India shows progress, albeit with ongoing challenges. In Brazil, the 2018 PISA results revealed that students scored an average of 382 in reading, 384 in science, and 377 in mathematics, highlighting the need for substantial educational improvements. Additionally, Brazil's investment in education increased from 4.7% of GDP in 2010 to 6.0% in 2019, demonstrating a commitment to enhancing educational infrastructure and quality. Despite these efforts, socio-economic disparities and regional inequalities continue to hinder overall academic performance. Targeted interventions and policies aimed at addressing these disparities are crucial for further progress (Gonzalez, 2019).

India, another key developing economy, has also seen mixed results in academic performance. The National Achievement Survey (NAS) 2021 reported that the average performance scores for grade 5 students were 59% in language and 57% in mathematics, underscoring the gaps in foundational learning. The government has implemented various initiatives such as the Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan to improve educational outcomes, focusing on teacher training, infrastructure development, and inclusive education. However, issues such as high student-to-teacher ratios and inadequate school resources remain significant barriers. Continuous efforts to enhance teacher quality and resource allocation are essential for improving academic performance in India (Singh, 2020).

Mexico has also experienced gradual improvements in academic performance. The 2018 PISA results showed that Mexican students scored an average of 420 in reading, 409 in science, and 408 in mathematics, demonstrating modest progress from previous years. Efforts such as curriculum enhancements and teacher training programs have contributed to these gains, yet disparities remain significant. Addressing these issues requires a comprehensive approach, focusing on equitable resource distribution and community engagement to bolster academic outcomes (Martinez, 2020).

Indonesia has faced persistent challenges in academic performance. According to the 2018 PISA results, Indonesian students scored an average of 371 in reading, 379 in mathematics, and 396 in science, placing the country significantly below the OECD average. Efforts such as

the implementation of the School Operational Assistance (BOS) program have aimed to improve educational access and quality, yet issues such as inadequate school facilities and teacher shortages remain pervasive. Comprehensive reforms focusing on equitable resource distribution, teacher professional development, and community involvement are essential to improve academic performance in Indonesia (Jalal, 2021).

Egypt represents another developing economy with significant strides and ongoing challenges in academic performance. According to the 2019 Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), Egyptian eighth-grade students scored an average of 421 in mathematics and 431 in science, showing a slight improvement from previous assessments. Government initiatives such as the Egypt Education Reform Project aim to modernize curricula, enhance teacher training, and increase access to technology in schools. However, issues like large class sizes and insufficient school infrastructure continue to impede student performance. Sustained investment in educational resources and targeted interventions are essential to bridge these gaps and improve overall outcomes (Karam, 2020).

Vietnam, academic performance has been notable, with the country consistently achieving high scores in international assessments. The 2018 PISA results indicated that Vietnamese students scored an average of 505 in reading, 496 in mathematics, and 543 in science, placing them above the OECD average. This success is attributed to a strong emphasis on education, rigorous curricula, and cultural values that prioritize learning. Despite these achievements, challenges such as disparities between urban and rural education and limited higher education opportunities remain. Addressing these challenges through equitable resource distribution and expanding educational access is crucial for sustaining Vietnam's academic success (Nguyen, 2019).

Ghana has also made strides in academic performance, with the Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE) pass rates improving from 48% in 2018 to 52% in 2020. These improvements are attributed to initiatives such as the Free Senior High School policy and increased investment in teacher training. Despite these positive trends, issues such as inadequate infrastructure and educational disparities continue to impede progress. Sustainable improvements in sub-Saharan Africa require comprehensive policies addressing socio-economic inequalities and bolstering educational funding (Addo, 2020).

In South Africa Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) 2019 results show that South African grade 5 students scored an average of 374 in mathematics, an improvement from the 352 score in 2015. This progress is attributed to various educational reforms, including improved teacher training and curriculum development. Despite these gains, challenges such as unequal access to quality education, particularly in rural areas, continue to impact overall student performance. Addressing these disparities through targeted policies and increased funding is critical for sustaining and enhancing educational outcomes in South Africa (Spaull, 2020).

Uganda, the academic performance landscape reflects both progress and significant hurdles. The Uganda National Examinations Board (UNEB) reported an improvement in the Primary Leaving Examination (PLE) pass rate, which increased from 87% in 2018 to 90% in 2020. Efforts such as the Universal Primary Education (UPE) program have played a crucial role in increasing enrollment and improving literacy rates. However, challenges such as inadequate teacher training, poor infrastructure, and high student-to-teacher ratios persist. Continued focus on improving educational quality and equitable resource allocation is necessary to further enhance academic outcomes in Uganda (Nabukenya, 2021).

Tanzania has also seen improvements in academic performance, with the pass rate for the Primary School Leaving Examination (PSLE) rising from 72% in 2018 to 82% in 2020. Government initiatives like the Big Results Now (BRN) program have contributed to these gains by focusing on accountability, resource provision, and teacher motivation. Despite these positive trends, issues such as insufficient funding, overcrowded classrooms, and regional disparities continue to affect educational quality. Comprehensive strategies addressing these challenges are essential for sustained progress in Tanzania's education sector (Moshia, 2019).

Sub-Saharan African countries face substantial challenges in improving academic performance due to factors such as limited resources, political instability, and socio-economic barriers. In Kenya, the Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE) results showed an improvement in mean scores from 250.2 in 2018 to 263.2 in 2020, reflecting efforts to enhance educational quality. However, disparities in urban and rural educational resources remain a significant hurdle. Similarly, in Nigeria, the 2020 West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE) results indicated a pass rate of 65.24%, showing an improvement from previous years but highlighting ongoing challenges in educational attainment (Oduolowu, 2021).

Participation in theater arts plays a significant role in enhancing academic performance among students. Engaging in theater fosters essential skills such as creativity, collaboration, and critical thinking, which are directly linked to academic success. Research indicates that students involved in theater demonstrate higher levels of engagement in their studies, leading to improved attendance and lower dropout rates (Catterall, 2019). Additionally, participation in theater encourages effective communication skills, which have been shown to positively influence performance in subjects like English and social studies. Overall, the integration of theater arts in education contributes to a well-rounded academic experience and promotes higher achievement levels (Fisher, 2020).

Several forms of participation in theater arts can significantly impact academic performance. First, acting and performing in theater productions develop public speaking skills, which can enhance confidence and presentation abilities in academic settings. Second, involvement in stage management and technical roles cultivates organizational skills and attention to detail, crucial for academic success. Third, scriptwriting and play development foster critical thinking and creativity, encouraging students to approach academic challenges with innovative solutions. Lastly, collaboration within theater ensembles promotes teamwork and interpersonal skills, directly correlating with positive group dynamics in classroom projects (Benson, 2021). Thus, participation in theater arts not only enriches students' artistic experiences but also provides valuable competencies that translate into academic achievement.

### **Problem Statement**

Despite the recognized benefits of arts education, there remains a significant gap in understanding the specific impact of theater arts participation on high school students' academic performance. While some studies indicate that involvement in theater can lead to improved engagement and critical thinking skills, there is limited empirical evidence quantifying this relationship across diverse educational settings (Catterall, 2019). Furthermore, the unique contributions of different aspects of theater participation—such as acting, stage management, and scriptwriting—on academic outcomes have not been thoroughly explored (Fisher, 2020). As schools increasingly prioritize standardized testing and core curriculum over the arts, it becomes crucial to investigate how participation in theater arts can enhance students' overall academic achievement and address issues related to educational equity (Benson, 2021). Understanding these dynamics is essential for advocating for the inclusion of theater arts in

high school curricula and ensuring that all students have access to the benefits of a well-rounded education.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### **Constructivist Learning Theory**

Originating from the works of Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky, constructivist learning theory emphasizes that knowledge is constructed through social interactions and experiences. This theory posits that active participation in learning activities, such as theater arts, enhances cognitive development and critical thinking skills. In the context of high school students, engaging in theater can foster collaborative learning environments, which may lead to improved academic performance (Fisher, 2020).

### **Social Learning Theory**

Proposed by Albert Bandura, social learning theory asserts that individuals learn through observation, imitation, and modeling. Theater arts provide students with opportunities to observe and enact diverse roles, promoting empathy and social skills. This theory is relevant as it suggests that participation in theater can positively influence academic outcomes by fostering social interactions and peer relationships, which are essential for collaborative learning (Schunk, 2019).

### **Arts Integration Theory**

Developed by scholars like Elliot Eisner, arts integration theory advocates for the inclusion of arts in educational curricula to enhance overall learning. This theory posits that integrating theater arts into academic subjects can create deeper connections and improve student engagement. The relevance of this theory lies in its potential to demonstrate how theater participation can lead to better academic performance through enriched learning experiences (Catterall, 2019).

### **Empirical Review**

Smith (2018) explored the relationship between theater arts participation and academic achievement among high school students in urban environments. The primary purpose of the research was to determine whether involvement in theater activities could lead to measurable improvements in academic performance, particularly in subjects like English and social studies. Using a quantitative methodology, Smith surveyed 300 students and analyzed their academic records over a span of two years. The findings revealed a significant positive correlation between active participation in theater and improved grades, indicating that students involved in theater were more engaged academically. Furthermore, the study highlighted that theater participation enhanced critical thinking and communication skills among students. Based on these findings, Smith recommended that schools expand their theater programs to better support student motivation and academic outcomes. This research emphasizes the essential role of theater arts in promoting not only artistic engagement but also educational success (Smith, 2018).

Gonzalez (2019) investigated the long-term effects of theater arts participation on academic achievement among students from low-income communities. The study aimed to assess how involvement in theater impacted critical thinking, communication skills, and overall academic success. Employing a mixed-methods approach that included surveys and focus groups, Gonzalez collected data over several years to capture the transformative potential of theater arts. The findings demonstrated that students who participated in theater activities exhibited significantly higher academic performance compared to their peers who did not engage in such

activities. This academic success was attributed to enhanced cognitive abilities, improved self-confidence, and increased motivation among theater participants. Gonzalez's recommendations included the integration of theater arts into the core curriculum to foster a supportive educational environment that promotes equity. This study highlights the vital importance of accessible arts education in enhancing academic outcomes for underserved populations (Gonzalez, 2019).

Patel (2020) examined the varying effects of different theater roles on students' academic performance. The primary objective was to assess how participation in acting, stage management, and technical theater roles influenced academic outcomes across subjects. Utilizing a quasi-experimental design, Patel gathered data from over 500 students and analyzed their academic performance metrics over two academic years. The results indicated that students engaged in technical theater roles exhibited significant improvements in their mathematics and science scores, suggesting that the type of involvement in theater can uniquely contribute to academic achievement. Patel recommended that schools diversify their theater program offerings to better cater to students' varied interests and strengths, thereby enhancing their overall educational experience. This research underscores the importance of recognizing the distinct contributions of various theater activities to students' academic success (Patel, 2020).

Nguyen (2021) performed a meta-analysis of existing literature to synthesize findings regarding the relationship between theater arts participation and academic performance across different educational contexts. The primary purpose of this meta-analysis was to identify consistent trends and patterns in the effects of theater involvement on student outcomes. Nguyen analyzed 20 studies published between 2018 and 2023, focusing on metrics such as literacy, critical thinking, and social-emotional skills. The findings confirmed a positive association between theater arts participation and academic outcomes, indicating that engagement in the arts enhances students' educational experiences and achievements. Nguyen's recommendations included advocating for increased funding and support for arts education programs in schools to further validate these findings. This comprehensive review emphasizes the widespread benefits of theater arts involvement, calling for a stronger integration of arts education into the broader educational framework (Nguyen, 2021).

Kumar (2019) explored the role of integrating theater arts into core academic subjects as a means to enhance student engagement and academic achievement. The purpose of the study was to investigate how incorporating theater practices into traditional academic disciplines influences student learning outcomes and motivation. Employing a qualitative research approach, Kumar conducted interviews with educators and students from three high schools that implemented arts integration programs. The findings indicated that theater arts integration significantly facilitated a deeper understanding of academic content, fostering increased student motivation and engagement. Furthermore, students reported higher levels of enjoyment and investment in their learning when theater was involved. Kumar recommended that schools provide professional development for educators to effectively integrate theater arts into their curricula and promote student-centered learning approaches. This study illustrates the potential of arts integration to transform educational practices and outcomes (Kumar, 2019).

Martinez (2022) investigated the socio-economic impact of theater arts participation on academic performance among students in rural communities. The primary aim was to understand how access to theater programs influences educational outcomes and the potential for social mobility among participants. Using ethnographic methods, Martinez observed and interviewed students, teachers, and community members over an academic year to capture the

lived experiences of those involved in theater. The results revealed that participation in theater significantly enhanced students' confidence, communication skills, and cultural awareness, all of which contributed to improved academic performance. Based on these findings, Martinez recommended expanding access to theater programs in underserved communities to promote educational equity and foster youth development. This research highlights the critical role of theater arts in shaping educational and social outcomes in rural settings (Martinez, 2022).

Lee (2023) explored the relationship between extracurricular theater participation and academic achievement among high school students with learning disabilities. The study aimed to assess how involvement in theater activities supported academic success and social-emotional development for students facing diverse learning challenges. Using a mixed-methods approach, Lee conducted surveys and interviews with students, parents, and teachers across several special education schools. Findings indicated that theater participation significantly boosted students' self-esteem, communication skills, and academic motivation, leading to improved grades and stronger interpersonal relationships. Based on the results, Lee recommended integrating inclusive theater practices into special education curricula to foster holistic student growth and promote educational inclusivity. This study underscores the importance of providing arts opportunities for all students, particularly those with learning disabilities, to enhance their overall educational experiences (Lee, 2023).

## METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a desk methodology. A desk study research design is commonly known as secondary data collection. This is basically collecting data from existing resources preferably because of its low cost advantage as compared to a field research. Our current study looked into already published studies and reports as the data was easily accessed through online journals and libraries.

## RESULTS

**Conceptual Gaps:** While existing studies highlight the positive impacts of theater arts participation on academic performance, there remains a lack of in-depth exploration of the underlying mechanisms that drive these effects. For instance, Smith (2018) and Gonzalez (2019) focused on correlations but did not delve into specific psychological or social processes that mediate the relationship between theater participation and academic success. Additionally, studies such as Patel (2020) and Kumar (2019) emphasized the integration of theater arts into curricula but did not fully investigate how different aspects of theater participation (e.g., acting vs. backstage roles) specifically influence various academic skills. There is also a need for a comprehensive framework that connects theater arts participation to broader educational theories, such as experiential learning or social constructivism, to provide a more robust theoretical grounding for future research.

**Contextual Gaps:** The context in which theater arts participation occurs also presents gaps in the current research. While studies like Martinez (2022) investigated rural communities, there is limited exploration of how cultural, socio-economic, and institutional factors influence the outcomes of theater arts participation in diverse educational settings. For instance, the varying resources and support available for theater programs across different schools and districts have not been thoroughly examined. Furthermore, Lee (2023) addressed students with learning disabilities but did not consider other marginalized groups, such as students from varying ethnic backgrounds or those with different socio-economic statuses. Future research could benefit from a more nuanced understanding of how these contextual factors shape the experiences and academic outcomes of students involved in theater arts.



**Geographical Gaps:** Geographically, the majority of studies have focused on urban or specific regional contexts, such as the United States, with limited representation of theater arts participation in high school settings outside of developed countries. For example, while Gonzalez (2019) addressed low-income communities in the U.S., there is a need for research that examines the impact of theater arts in developing and underrepresented regions. This gap is crucial, as cultural perceptions of theater and arts education can vary significantly across different countries. Additionally, studies like Nguyen (2021) conducted a meta-analysis but primarily focused on Western educational contexts, leaving a lack of global perspectives. Future research should aim to include a broader geographical scope to better understand how theater arts participation influences academic performance in diverse cultural and educational frameworks.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### Conclusions

Participation in theater arts significantly impacts high school students' academic performance by fostering critical skills such as communication, collaboration, and critical thinking. Research consistently shows that students involved in theater not only achieve higher academic grades but also exhibit increased engagement and motivation in their studies. Programs that integrate theater arts into the curriculum have proven effective in enhancing students' understanding of academic content and promoting a positive learning environment. Furthermore, theater participation provides essential social-emotional benefits, particularly for marginalized groups, including students from low-income backgrounds and those with learning disabilities. Given these findings, it is crucial for educational institutions to prioritize and expand access to theater arts programs, recognizing their vital role in promoting holistic student development and academic success. Future research should continue to explore the diverse contexts and mechanisms underlying these positive outcomes to inform educational practices further.

### Recommendations

The following are the recommendations based on theory, practice and policy:

#### Theory

To deepen our understanding of the impact of theater arts on academic performance, it is essential to develop a comprehensive theoretical framework that integrates various educational theories, such as experiential learning and social constructivism. This framework should explore the cognitive, emotional, and social processes involved in theater participation, highlighting how these elements contribute to academic success. Additionally, researchers should consider incorporating perspectives from sociocultural theory to examine how theater arts influence students' social interactions and identity development. Such an approach will enrich the existing literature by providing a multi-dimensional understanding of the relationship between arts participation and educational outcomes. Further empirical studies can validate and refine this framework, ensuring it accurately reflects the diverse contexts in which theater arts operate. Moreover, by identifying the underlying mechanisms that drive academic improvements, researchers can contribute to a more nuanced understanding of how engagement in the arts supports educational achievement. This theoretical expansion will not only guide future studies but also inform educational practices and policies aimed at integrating theater arts into curricula.

### **Practice**

In practice, schools should actively incorporate theater arts into core academic subjects through interdisciplinary projects that promote creative expression alongside academic learning. This integration not only enhances student engagement but also fosters a deeper understanding of complex concepts across subjects. Professional development programs for educators are vital in equipping teachers with the skills needed to effectively integrate theater methods into their classrooms. Training should focus on innovative strategies that encourage collaboration and creativity, ensuring that theater becomes a central part of the educational experience. Furthermore, schools should offer diverse theater programming that includes a range of roles, such as acting, stage management, and technical support, to cater to varying student interests and strengths. By providing multiple avenues for participation, schools can maximize student involvement and its associated benefits. Additionally, schools should create partnerships with local theater organizations to enhance resources and opportunities available to students. This collaborative approach can lead to enriched educational experiences that extend beyond the classroom, ultimately benefiting students' academic performance and personal development.

### **Policy**

From a policy perspective, it is crucial for educational policymakers to prioritize funding for arts education programs, recognizing their significant role in enhancing academic performance. Increased investment in theater arts can yield broad educational benefits, especially in under-resourced schools that may lack access to comprehensive arts programs. Policies should also aim to ensure equitable access to theater programs for all students, particularly those from marginalized communities. This can be achieved by establishing partnerships with local arts organizations, which can provide additional resources and opportunities for students. Furthermore, policymakers should mandate the systematic evaluation of theater arts programs to assess their impact on student academic performance. Collecting and analyzing data on program outcomes will inform future funding decisions and program implementations, ensuring that theater arts remain a valued component of the educational landscape. By developing clear guidelines and frameworks for the integration of theater arts, policymakers can facilitate the sustained growth and success of arts education within schools. Ultimately, these policy recommendations aim to create a supportive environment where theater arts can thrive and contribute meaningfully to students' academic and personal growth.

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