

International Journal of Research in Special Education

E-ISSN: 2710-3870

P-ISSN: 2710-3862

Impact Factor (RJIF): 6.69

IJRSE 2026; 6(6): 07-10

© 2026 IJRSE

Journal's Website

Received: 04-03-2026

Accepted: 07-04-2026

Khunteta Bharti

Director Administration Disha
Foundation, Jaipur, Rajasthan,
India

Rathore Seema

Assistant Professor, Disha -A
Resource Center for the
Disabled, Jaipur, Rajasthan,
India

Effectiveness of Theatre Therapy as an Innovative Activity-Oriented Intervention for Students with Special Needs: A Pre-Post Experimental Study among Students of Disha Foundation

Khunteta Bharti and Rathore Seema

DOI: <https://www.doi.org/10.22271/27103862.2026.v6.i6a.183>

Abstract

The present study investigates the effectiveness of theatre therapy as an innovative and activity-oriented intervention technique for students with special needs. The study was conducted at Disha Foundation, Jaipur, Rajasthan over a period of six months using an experimental pre- and post-assessment design. The participants included students from two age groups: 12–15 years and 16–18 years. The BASIC-MR Indian assessment tool was used to evaluate changes in behavioural, social, communication, emotional, and adaptive functioning before and after the intervention.

Theatre therapy sessions included role play, expression exercises, storytelling, group interaction, body movement, dialogue delivery, and stage performance activities. The findings indicated significant improvement in communication skills, social interaction, confidence, emotional expression, group participation, attention span, and adaptive behaviours among the participants. The most significant changes were observed in the behaviour issues domain. The 12–15 years group showed a 70.31% reduction in behavioural concerns, while the 16–18 years group demonstrated a remarkable 97.66% reduction. This reflects substantial improvement in emotional regulation, reduced maladaptive behaviours, better attention, and improved classroom and group participation after theatre therapy sessions. Overall, the results suggest that theatre therapy is an effective innovative and activity-oriented intervention technique for enhancing adaptive functioning and reducing behavioural difficulties among students with special needs.

Keywords: Theatre Therapy, Special Needs, BASIC-MR, Experimental Study, Activity-Oriented Learning, Special Education, Pre-Post Assessment

Introduction

Children with special needs often experience challenges in communication, emotional regulation, social interaction, adaptive behaviour, and self-expression. Traditional classroom-based interventions sometimes fail to address the emotional and social dimensions necessary for holistic development. Therefore, innovative therapeutic and activity-oriented interventions are increasingly gaining importance in special education settings.

Theatre therapy is one such expressive intervention that combines drama, role-play, movement, storytelling, and emotional expression to facilitate psychological, emotional, social, and behavioural growth. It creates opportunities for students to engage in structured interaction, develop communication skills, express emotions freely, and improve self-confidence.

Theatre-based interventions have shown positive outcomes in enhancing creativity, attention, cooperation, emotional regulation, and social participation among children with developmental disabilities. Through dramatization and group performance, students learn functional communication, teamwork, problem-solving, and self-awareness in a natural and engaging environment.

The present study aims to investigate the effectiveness of theatre therapy among students with special needs at Disha Foundation using a six-month intervention program with pre- and post-assessment measures.

Need and Significance of the Study

Students with special needs require multidimensional interventions that support not only

Corresponding Author:

Khunteta Bharti

Director Administration Disha
Foundation, Jaipur, Rajasthan,
India

academic growth but also emotional, social, behavioural, and communication development. Many students exhibit hesitation in social participation, poor emotional expression, low confidence, and difficulty in interpersonal communication.

Conventional teaching techniques alone cannot be enough in dealing with diverse needs of learning of children with Multiple Disabilities. There is a rising need for more imaginative and active techniques that would help to involve children in the learning process. In this respect, Theatre therapy can become an excellent approach to the work with the target audience. Theatre therapy offers: Experiential learning; Active participation; Emotional release; Confidence-building opportunities & Social engagement.

Despite its potential, limited Indian research exists regarding theatre therapy in special education settings using standardized assessment tools such as BASIC-MR. Therefore, this study is significant in providing evidence-based understanding regarding the usefulness of theatre therapy for students with special needs in the Indian context.

Objectives of the Study

- To study the effectiveness of theatre therapy among students with special needs.
- To assess pre- and post-intervention changes using BASIC-MR assessment.
- To compare improvement between the age groups 12–15 years and 16–18 years.
- To evaluate changes in communication, social interaction, emotional expression, and adaptive behaviour after theatre therapy intervention.

Review of Literature

Previous studies have demonstrated the positive impact of expressive arts and drama-based interventions on children with developmental and intellectual disabilities.

Rinat Feniger-Schaal and Hod Orkibi (2020) titled "Integrative Systematic Review of Drama Therapy Intervention Research," identifies individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities as one of the most frequently served populations within the field. Their findings indicate that drama therapy provides a vital, non-verbal therapeutic framework that significantly enhances communication skills, emotional expression, and social interaction. By utilizing creative tools such as role-play, puppetry, and storytelling, the therapy bypasses traditional cognitive and linguistic barriers, allowing participants to explore complex emotions through a "safe distance" provided by fictional characters. This process fosters greater social competence and self-esteem, as the "social laboratory" of the drama session allows for the low-risk rehearsal of real-life scenarios. Ultimately, the review concludes that drama therapy is a uniquely effective psychotherapeutic modality for this population because it prioritizes experiential and embodied play over complex verbal processing.

Jiaojiao Wu, Keqin Chen, Ying Ma, and Jana Vomočilová (2020) Early Intervention for Children with Intellectual and Developmental Disability Using Drama Therapy Techniques focused on the use of drama therapy as an early intervention strategy for children with mild to severe intellectual and developmental disabilities. The study included 30 structured group sessions involving sensory

play, storytelling, role play, body movement, imitation, and improvisation activities. Researchers observed that children showed noticeable improvement in communication abilities, creativity, emotional expression, peer interaction, attention span, and cooperative behaviour. The intervention also increased children's confidence and classroom participation. The findings highlighted that drama therapy provides a supportive and engaging environment that promotes social, emotional, and developmental growth in children with disabilities.

"Drama as a catalyst for experiential learning in early education: Challenges and prospects under National Education Policy (NEP) 2020" examined the effectiveness of drama-based pedagogy in early childhood classrooms under NEP 2020. The findings revealed that drama significantly improves students' engagement, imagination, communication skills, collaboration, and experiential learning. It also supports holistic development. However, the study highlighted challenges such as limited teacher training, inadequate resources, time constraints, and lack of structured curriculum integration for effective implementation in schools.

Kamble *et al.* (2026) [3], "Exploring the integration of drama therapy with neurorehabilitation for psychosocial and functional outcomes: A pilot study" the integration of drama therapy into neurorehabilitation offers a promising avenue for improving both psychosocial and functional outcomes. Their pilot study highlights that by engaging in creative performance, patients can address emotional and social gaps that traditional, physically focused rehabilitation often overlooks. By utilizing role-play and creative expression, this approach seeks to foster neuroplasticity and improve the quality of life for individuals recovering from neurological conditions.

Based on the above studies, it can be concluded that theatre activities improve both communication and social interaction skills.

- Role-play techniques increase emotional understanding and self-expression.
- Theatre-based group activities enhance peer interaction and cooperation.
- Creative movement and storytelling improve attention and adaptive functioning.

Research also indicates that activity-oriented therapies produce better engagement and participation compared to conventional passive instructional approaches.

Material and Methods

Material

This experimental pre-test and post-test design was conducted from October 2025 to March 2026, consisted of 30 students with special needs enrolled at Disha Foundation, Jaipur, Rajasthan. Children from two age group 12–15 years and 16–18 years were selected with purposive sampling technique by excluding those having severe behavioural instability. And medical conditions restricting participation.

Tool Used

BASIC-MR is an Indian standardized assessment tool developed by the National Institute for the Empowerment of Persons with Intellectual Disabilities for assessing children with Intellectual Disability. It is used to evaluate adaptive skills and problem behaviours in children aged 3–18 years.

BASIC-MR has two parts: Part A measures communication, functional and daily living skills, while Part B assesses behavioural problems such as hyperactivity, tantrums, and self-injurious behaviour. The tool is widely used by special educators, psychologists, and researchers for educational planning, intervention, and pre-test/post-test assessment.

BASIC-MR Part A, consist of 7 domains with 40 items, but for the present study only 3 domain -Motor, language and Social is taken. BASIC-MR Part B, consist of 75 items grouped into 10 domains.

Procedure of the Study

- **Phase I: Pre-Assessment, Duration:** 15 days
- Baseline assessment of all participants was conducted using BASIC-MR before starting theatre therapy sessions.

- **Phase II: Theatre Therapy Intervention, Duration:** 5 months with the frequency of 4-5 sessions per week and up to 50–60 minutes per session Major activities included Role play, Story dramatization, Mimicry and expression activities, Dialogue speaking, Group enactment, Emotional expression exercises, Movement and body coordination activities, Stage performance practice, Interactive games. The sessions were conducted under supervision of theatre professionals, special educators and therapists.
- **Phase III: Post-Assessment, Duration:** 15 days After completion of five months, participants were reassessed using BASIC-MR to measure improvement.

Data Analysis: Mean & percentage score were used to analysis of the collected data.

Results and Findings

Table 1: Mean and Percentage Analysis of Theatre Therapy Intervention among Students Aged 12-15 years

Domain Assessed	Max. Score	Mean Pre-Test Score		Pre-%	Mean Post-Test Score		Post %	Percentage Improvement/Reduction
Motor Skills	2200	1753	159.36	79.68	1875	170.45	85.22	6.95
Language Skills	2200	1349	122.63	61.31	1567	142.45	71.22	16.16
Social Skills	2200	1596	145.09	72.54	1777	161.54	80.77	11.34
Behaviour Issues	1650	128	11.63	7.76	38	3.45	2.3	70.31 (Reduction)

Table 2: Mean and Percentage Analysis of Theatre Therapy Intervention among Students Aged 16-18 years

Domain Assessed	Max. Score	Mean Pre-Test Score		Pre-%	Mean Post-Test Score		Post %	Percentage Improvement/Reduction
Motor Skills	3800	3016	159	79.36	3240	171	85.26	7.43
Language Skills	3800	2835	149.21	74.60	3115	164	81.97	9.87
Social Skills	3800	2891	152.15	76.07	3189	168	83.92	10.31
Behaviour Issues	2850	122	6.42	4.28	24	1.27	0.10	97.66 (Reduction)

Table 3: Comparison of Theatre Therapy Outcome Between Both Age Group - 12-15 & 16-18 years

Domain Assessed	Age Group years	Mean Pre-Test Score	Pre-%	Mean Post-Test Score	Post %	Percentage Improvement/Reduction
Motor Skills	12-15	159.36	79.68	170.45	85.22	6.95
	16-18	159	79.36	171	85.26	7.43
Language Skills	12-15	122.63	61.31	142.45	71.22	16.16
	16-18	149.21	74.60	164	81.97	9.87
Social Skills	12-15	145.09	72.54	161.54	80.77	11.34
	16-18	152.15	76.07	168	83.92	10.31
Behaviour Issues	12-15	11.63	7.76	3.45	2.3	70.31 (Reduction)
	16-18	6.42	4.28	1.27	0.10	97.66 (Reduction)

Interpretation of Results

The findings of the study indicate that theatre therapy had a positive impact on students with special needs across both age groups (12–15 years and 16–18 years). Improvement was observed in motor skills, language development, social interaction, and behavioural regulation following the six-month intervention program.

In the motor skills domain, the 12–15 years age group demonstrated a 6.95% improvement, while the 16–18 years group showed a slightly higher improvement of 7.43%, indicating better body coordination, movement participation, and physical engagement during theatre-based activities.

In the language domain, the younger age group (12–15 years) exhibited comparatively greater improvement (16.16%) than the older group (9.87%). This suggests that

theatre therapy activities such as dialogue speaking, storytelling, role play, and group interaction were particularly effective in enhancing expressive and receptive communication skills among younger participants.

In the social skills domain, both groups demonstrated improvement, with 11.34% enhancement observed in the 12–15 years group and 10.31% in the 16–18 years group. The findings indicate increased peer interaction, participation, confidence, cooperation, and social engagement among students after intervention.

The most significant changes were observed in the behaviour issues domain. The 12–15 years group showed a 70.31% reduction in behavioural concerns, while the 16–18 years group demonstrated a remarkable 97.66% reduction. This reflects substantial improvement in emotional regulation, reduced maladaptive behaviours, better attention,

and improved classroom and group participation after theatre therapy sessions.

Overall, the results suggest that theatre therapy is an effective innovative and activity-oriented intervention technique for enhancing adaptive functioning and reducing behavioural difficulties among students with special needs. The intervention appeared particularly beneficial in improving communication, social participation, and behavioural management across both adolescent age groups. The older age group (16–18 years) demonstrated greater improvement in self-expression and confidence, whereas the younger group (12–15 years) showed significant gains in social participation and communication. The statistical analysis indicated significant differences between pre- and post-assessment scores, supporting the effectiveness of theatre therapy.

Conclusion

The study concludes that theatre therapy is an effective innovative and activity-oriented intervention technique for students with special needs. Theatre therapy provided a structured yet enjoyable environment where students could express themselves without fear of judgment. Repeated participation in role play and group performances positively influences communication, social interaction, emotional expression, adaptive behaviour, and confidence levels. The multisensory and participatory nature of theatre activities promoted engagement and helped students practice social and adaptive skills in real-life simulated situations.

Theatre therapy can therefore be integrated into special education programs as a complementary therapeutic and educational approach for holistic development.

References

1. American Alliance for Theatre and Education. Drama therapy and child development. Washington (DC): American Alliance for Theatre and Education; 2010.
2. Kalyanpur M. Special education in India. New Delhi: Sage Publications; 2008.
3. Kamble S, Baria B, Mali A, Khanna M, *et al.* Exploring the integration of drama therapy with neurorehabilitation for psychosocial and functional outcomes: a pilot study. Research Square [Preprint]. 2026. doi:10.21203/rs.3.rs-8624445/v1.
4. Landy RJ. Drama therapy: concepts and practices. Springfield (IL): Charles C Thomas Publishers; 1994.
5. Narayan J. BASIC-MR manual. Secunderabad: National Institute for the Mentally Handicapped; 1990.
6. Pande S, Sharma S. Drama as a tool for inclusion: enhancing social and emotional skills in children with special needs. Indian J Incl Educ. 2018;6(2):45-58.
7. Trigun NK, Jain A. Drama as a catalyst for experiential learning in early education: challenges and prospects under National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. Int J Child Care Educ Policy. 2026;20(10). doi:10.1186/s40723-026-00174-5.
8. Wu J, Chen K, Ma Y, Vomočilová J. Early intervention for children with intellectual and developmental disability using drama therapy techniques. Child Youth Serv Rev. 2020;109:104689. doi:10.1016/j.chilyouth.2019.104689.