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Determinants of the Self-Efficacy of Prospective Teachers in Using Drama Activities for Kindergarten: A Sample from the Arab Region

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Abstract: Modern education increasingly focuses on interweaving drama as an integral part of pre-school education. Given that teachers' self-efficacy in meeting expected tasks tends to stabilize over time and is grounded in their success and failure experiences as tertiary students, addressing self-efficacy among prospective teachers before starting their profession is strategic. This study assessed self-efficacy among prospective teachers in using drama activities for kindergarten and its determinants among prospective teachers in Jordan. The study also discussed the potential risks associated with using drama activities within the Jordanian education system. The study utilized a cross-sectional design with a sample of undergraduate university students majoring in kindergarten education (N = 234). All universities that offer kindergarten education baccalaureate degrees in Jordan were targeted (N = 6). An online survey was used to collect data from students aged 18 to 21 regarding their academic characteristics, self-efficacy, attitudes toward the teaching profession, and communication skills. The results showed high levels of perceived self-efficacy in utilizing drama with children. The reports were high in all domains, including perceived self-efficacy in classroom planning, classroom management, and preparing and evaluating learning and teaching environments for drama activities. Almost 30% of the variability in prospective teachers' self-efficacy could be explained by their attitudes toward the teaching profession, communication skills, as well as some academic characteristics. Kindergarten education curricula should foster students' interest and attitudes toward teaching and help them improve, learn, and use communication skills effectively. Measuring and managing the risk of using drama activities in Jordanian schools and similar contexts is also warranted.

Keywords: drama; early-years education; kindergarten; pre-school education; self-efficacy

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1. Introduction

There is a general consensus in the scientific community that the early education offered by the kindergarten serves as the foundation of children's learning journey, helping them progress upward on the learning curve. Kindergarten provides children with life skills and opportunities to become confident learners in a safe and supported environment (Bassok et al. 2016; Wick et al. 2017). Therefore, the significance of the role of kindergarten teachers cannot be overstated. As it is not merely about preparing children for the higher grades of elementary school, kindergarten teachers need to possess several strengths and qualities to enable them to motivate children for learning while preserving a sense of joy in every day (McGill-Franzen 2006; Marín Murcia and Ruiz-Funes 2020).

Utilizing drama activities for kindergarten might be a particularly important aspect that shows the multifaceted role of a kindergarten teacher. Drama is one of the most effective methods in early-years education through which the child becomes an active rather than passive learner and is encouraged to think critically, creatively, and freely, while promoting their own cognitive, social, affective, linguistic, communication, and

psychomotor skills (Aksoy 2019; Al-Khayat and Haroun 2017; Güleç and Macan 2014; Umuzdaş et al. 2019; Yasar and Aral 2012). Research evidence from more than a hundred experimental studies has supported the effectiveness of drama activities in achieving both permanent and functional learning outcomes among kindergarten children (Tombak 2014). Educators, policymakers, and teachers also recognize the importance of drama activities in supporting a successful learning process (Hui et al. 2011).

The use of drama activities in early education does not simply mean putting on plays for an audience of children. Rather, it is a holistic strategy that requires a high level of skill to achieve the core curricular goals using drama (Akyol et al. 2018). As such, beyond the mastery of drama knowledge and pedagogical skills, kindergarten teachers need to be confident in their abilities to enact effective drama activities and instructional practices to achieve intended learning outcomes. In other words, a sense of self-efficacy, “the belief in one’s capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to manage prospective situations” (Bandura 1995), is needed.

The importance of considering teachers’ self-efficacy as an influencing factor in teaching effectiveness, pedagogical practices, and students’ intended learning outcomes is rooted in Bandura’s (1977) social learning theory, which asserts that most human behavior is learned through observation, imitation, and modeling. Interestingly, Bandura extended the concept of self-efficacy to the context of education and referred specifically to the teacher’s self-efficacy as a significant influential factor in students’ educational outcomes. Teacher self-efficacy is viewed as a multifaceted concept that gauges a teacher’s perseverance regarding challenging tasks, such as classroom planning and management and promoting the classroom environment (Bandura 2002). Building on this theoretical framework, Tezer et al. (2019) conducted a study aimed at developing a model that can explain self-efficacy specifically within the context of drama in education. According to their findings, self-efficacy is composed of three main domains: classroom planning, classroom management, and preparing and evaluating the learning and teaching environment. This model was tested extensively and proved to be a solid explanation for the construct of self-efficacy in using drama (Barakat 2022; Citak Tunc and Yavas 2022; Hidayat and Patras 2022; Walag et al. 2022; Yüksel 2020).

Several factors may influence prospective teachers’ self-efficacy. Researchers and educators agree that, being a dynamic activity, teaching requires a positive attitude to help teachers develop a learner-friendly environment in the classroom (Al-Khayat 2019; Bhargava and Pathy 2014). Holding positive attitudes toward teaching can influence not only teachers’ beliefs about their capacity to perform well but also their actual performance inside and outside the classroom (Alkhateeb 2013; Dadandı et al. 2016; Tok 2011). As such, exploring prospective teachers’ attitudes toward the teaching profession contributes significantly to understanding their perceived self-efficacy (Alkhateeb 2013; Al-Khayat et al. 2013, 2022; Dadandı et al. 2016; Tok 2011).

The ability to communicate effectively might be decisive in providing students with the needed knowledge and skills. Further, successful communication can boost students’ self-confidence and enlighten their learning potential (Arac 2018), which are important for the effective inclusion of drama activities in kindergarten education. A study by Ozkan et al. (2014) found a positive significant correlation between the communication skills and self-efficacy levels of teacher candidates, controlling for students’ demographic characteristics. A recent study also found that communication skills affected both the attitude of student teachers toward the teaching profession and self-efficacy beliefs regarding the teaching profession (Yildirim 2021). Those who possess high levels of communication skills are often more competent in their ability to enact certain communication-related practices, such as teaching (Ozkan et al. 2014). This is particularly true when it comes to utilizing drama activities in early education where communication and interpersonal skills are amongst the most needed qualities for a teacher to achieve the intended learning outcomes through drama activities (Aksoy 2019).

The use of drama as a learning medium has earned an increasingly secure place in several educational systems, including those in the United States, Canada, Europe, and Turkey (Lehtonen et al. 2020). Unfortunately, the Arab region is still lagging far behind. In Jordan particularly, the use of drama activities in early-years education did not gain attention until very recently (Al-Khayat 2019). Currently, five out of the six universities that offer kindergarten education baccalaureate degrees include mandatory drama training in their study curricula. The training introduces students to the concept of drama and its influential role in early childhood education; identifies the characteristics needed for a drama teacher; and covers basic types of drama activities that can be utilized in kindergarten, including improvisation, mime, drama games, role plays, and performance poetry (Al-Khayat and Haroun 2017). However, no studies have yet explored the impact of such drama training on prospective students' knowledge, skills, and ability to utilize drama activities in their future profession.

Another critical issue here is that unofficial reports state that the actual use of drama activities in schools and kindergarten is very limited and almost absent (Al-Khayat 2019). This is alarming, as it indicates a gap between theory and practice. Without a solid base ensuring that educational systems are ready for educational innovations, there is the risk that education policies and systems become irrelevant to students' real and future needs. No studies have yet explored the perceived risk of using drama activities for kindergarten children in Jordan from teachers' or prospective teachers' perspectives.

Given that teachers' self-efficacy tends to stabilize over time and is grounded in their success and failure experiences as students (Tezer et al. 2019), addressing self-efficacy and its correlates among prospective teachers before starting their profession is strategic. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to assess the perceived self-efficacy of prospective teachers in using drama activities for kindergarten. The research questions were:

1. What are the perceptions of prospective kindergarten teachers regarding their ability to manage and execute drama activities?
2. Is there a relationship between prospective teachers' attitudes toward the teaching profession, communication skills, and self-efficacy in using drama activities for kindergarten?
3. What are the risks of using drama activities for kindergarten children in Jordan as perceived by prospective teachers?

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Design

The study utilized a cross-sectional design with a sample of undergraduate students majoring in kindergarten education. All universities that offer kindergarten education baccalaureate degrees in Jordan were targeted (N = 6). An online survey was used to collect data from students aged 18 to 21 regarding their academic characteristics, self-efficacy, attitudes toward the teaching profession, and communication skills. The survey link (which also included the consent form) was distributed using the universities' websites, student union pages, and other validated online student groups. The survey was anonymous, requiring no identifying information. Informed electronic consent was obtained from the students by requesting them to answer the question "After reading the study details, do you agree to participate in this survey?". Those who answered yes were able to navigate through the survey.

2.2. Measures

2.2.1. The Multi-Dimensional Self-Efficacy Belief Scale (Tezer et al. 2019)

This scale was used to assess prospective teachers' self-efficacy in using drama activities. It includes 35 items rated on a 5-point scale that indicates to what extent respondents agree on items related to one's belief in his or her capacity for utilizing drama activities in kindergarten education: Strongly disagree (1), Disagree (2), Not sure (3), Agree (4), and Strongly Agree (5) (Tezer et al. 2019). Higher scores indicate higher self-efficacy belief levels.

The scale includes three sub-dimensions: classroom planning (6 items; e.g., “Being able to set proper materials needed for the drama activities”.); classroom management (15 items; e.g., “Being able to direct students to drama activities that suit their abilities and interest”.); and preparing and evaluating the learning and teaching environment (14 items; e.g., “Being able to help students develop problem-solving skills through drama activities”.; “Being able to allow students evaluate their peers after completion of drama activities”). The psychometrics of the scale was supported (Tezer et al. 2019). In this study, Cronbach’s alpha for the total scale was 0.956.

2.2.2. The Attitude toward Teaching Profession Scale (Ustuner 2006)

This scale was used to assess prospective teachers’ attitudes toward the teaching profession. It includes 34 items that indicate to what extent respondents agree on items related to the teaching profession (e.g., “the idea of becoming a teacher attracts me”; “I believe teaching will bring me a prestigious status in society”). Items are rated on a 5-point scale: Strongly disagree (1), Disagree (2), Not sure (3), Agree (4), and Strongly Agree (5) (Ustuner 2006). Higher scores indicate a more positive attitude. The scale is unidimensional and showed robust psychometrics (Alkhateeb 2013; Ustuner 2006; Tezci and Terzi 2010). In this study, Cronbach’s alpha for the scale was 0.893.

2.2.3. The Communication Skills Inventory (Ersanli and Balci 1998)

This scale was used to assess prospective teachers’ communication skills. It includes 45 items that indicate to what extent respondents often utilize certain communication skills (e.g., “I pay attention to whether the person in front of me is willing to accept the advice I’m offering”; “I feel like I get tired while listening to people”). Items are rated on a 5-point scale: Never (1), Rarely (2), Sometimes (3), Usually (4), and Always (5) (Ersanli and Balci 1998). Higher scores indicate higher communication skill levels. The psychometrics of the scale was supported (Arac 2018; Eliöz 2016; Ersanli and Balci 1998). In this study, Cronbach’s alpha for the total scale was 0.855.

2.3. Translation

All measures were translated into Arabic as described by the World Health Organization’s Translation process (WHO 2005). First, the measures were translated from English to Arabic by a bilingual expert. Second, back translation was conducted blindly by another bilingual expert. Third, a panel of three experts in the field of education reviewed the translated battery for translation clarity and appropriateness. They also compared the original English forms and the back-translated versions. Discrepancies in the translation were discussed and resolved. Finally, pilot testing of the translated measures was conducted with 23 participants. Accordingly, some items required minor language editing.

2.4. Participants

The study’s sample included a total of 234 university students majoring in kindergarten education. The vast majority were female (98.7%, $N = 231$), and completed the literacy track of high school (79.1%, $N = 185$). About half (47.4%, $N = 111$) were third-year students and had very good GPAs (50.9%, $N = 119$). Regarding the completion of the drama activities training delivered as part of the study plan, only half of the participants reported that they completed it (49.1%, $N = 115$). Participants were from all six universities in Jordan that offer a B.A. in childhood education.

3. Results

3.1. Participants’ Reports on Study Variables

The mean score for self-efficacy total score was 145.47 ($SD = 14.75$), ranging from 76 to 175. In particular, participants scored a mean score of 63.18 ($SD = 6.51$) in the classroom management and communication domain; 57.14 ($SD = 6.44$) in the learning–teaching process and evaluation domain; and 25.14 ($SD = 2.91$) in the planning domain of self-

efficacy. Figure 1 shows the distribution of the total scores. The mean score for the attitude toward the teaching profession was 130.43 (SD = 14.35), ranging from 64 to 170. On the communication skills inventory, participants reported a mean score of 170.87 (SD = 16.78), ranging from 125 to 225. Table 1 summarizes all measures-related results.

Table 1. Participants' reports on study measures (N = 234).

Scale/Subscale	(M ± SD)	Q1	Median	Q3	Data Range	Possible Range	Cronbach's Alpha
The Multi-Dimensional Self-Efficacy Belief Scale	145.47 ± 14.75	137	141	153	76–175	35–175	0.956
Classroom management and communication	63.18 ± 6.51	59	61.5	68	35–75	15–75	0.912
Learning–teaching process and evaluation	57.14 ± 6.44	54	56	60	26–70	14–70	0.900
Planning	25.14 ± 2.91	23.75	24	27.25	14–30	6–30	0.857
The Attitude Toward the Teaching Profession Scale	130.43 ± 14.35	123	131	141	64–170	34–170	0.893
Communication Skills Inventory	170.87 ± 16.78	161	170	179	125–225	45–225	0.855

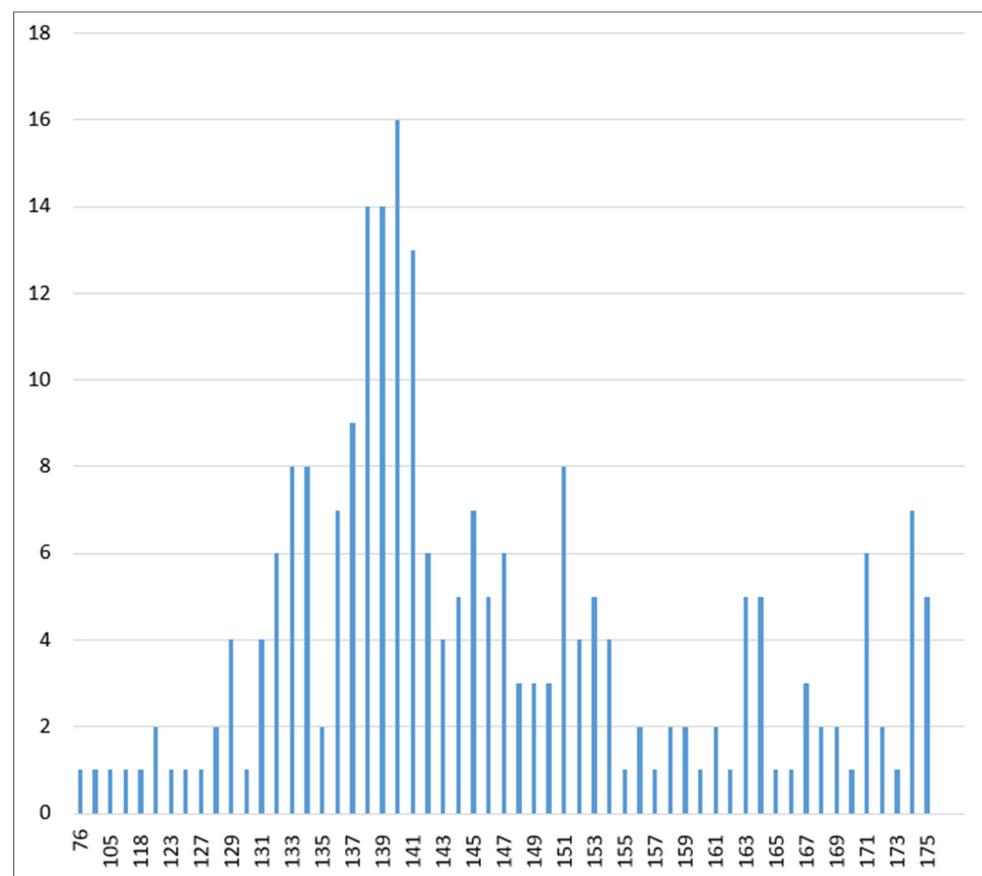


Figure 1. Self-efficacy scores distribution (N = 234).

3.2. Determinants of Self-Efficacy

Multiple linear regression was used to explore the determinants of prospective teachers' self-efficacy in using drama activities in kindergarten education. All test assumptions were verified, including linearity, normality, homoskedasticity, the independence of errors, and

the independence of independent variables (Kelley and Maxwell 2003). The analysis modeled self-efficacy as an outcome, while participants' attitudes toward the teaching profession, communication skills, high school track, year of study, GPA, and drama training completion status were modeled as potential predictors.

The results revealed that this model significantly predicted participants' self-efficacy ($F(6, 227) = 16.109, p < 0.001, R^2 = 0.299$). This model explained 0.299% of the variance in the outcome. In other words, almost 30% of the variability in prospective teachers' self-efficacy in using drama activities in kindergarten education could be explained by their attitude toward the teaching profession and their communication skills as well as some academic characteristics. Table 2 shows the model fit. The individual betas indicate that higher self-efficacy among the participants is significantly related to having a more positive attitude toward teaching as a profession and having higher levels of communication skills, controlling for other academic variations. To gain a closer look into these relationships, three separate regression models were also tested with the three self-efficacy subscales as outcomes. The model's fit remained almost similar, with only GPA being an added significant predictor for classroom management and communication subscale of self-efficacy ($t = 1.996, p = 0.047$). Individual betas revealed that the completion of the drama training did not have a significant contribution to the predictive power of the model.

Table 2. Determinants of self-efficacy (N = 234).

Variable	B	SE	t-Value	p-Value
High school track	0.098	0.610	1.731	0.085
Years of study	0.037	1.050	0.622	0.534
GPA	−0.111	1.069	1.954	0.052
Drama training	−0.055	1.774	−0.912	0.363
Attitudes toward teaching	0.396	0.062	6.515	0.000
Communication skills	0.213	0.053	3.543	0.000
$R^2 = 0.299$		F for change in $R^2 = 16.109$		DF = (6, 227)
				$p < 0.001$

B: regression coefficient; SE: standard error; DF: degree of freedom.

3.3. Perceived Risks of Using Drama Activities for Kindergarten Children in Jordan

Item-level analyses for the multi-dimensional self-efficacy belief scale revealed areas that prospective students believed might be potential risks and challenges when applying drama activities in kindergarten. Issues that received the highest agreement scores from participants included limited resources (82%), time constraints (73%), children's unwillingness to participate (51%), and difficulties in class control and learning outcomes evaluation (49%).

4. Discussion

Drama activities allow students to be more creative and configure knowledge more easily. Modern education increasingly focuses on weaving drama as an integral part of pre-school education (Hui et al. 2011; Tombak 2014). Thus, it is important to recognize prospective teachers' personal beliefs regarding their ability to utilize drama activities in teaching as well as factors that might influence those beliefs to better prepare them for their unique roles as teachers who have the interest and skills needed to create a reliable and attractive learning environment. To this aim, this study explored self-efficacy in using drama activities for kindergarten and its determinants among prospective teachers in Jordan.

The results showed high levels of self-efficacy in utilizing drama with children. The reports were high in all domains, including perceived self-efficacy in classroom planning, classroom management, and preparing and evaluating the learning and teaching environment for drama activities. These results are considered promising. Teachers' self-efficacy, or their beliefs regarding their ability to have students reach the intended learning outcome, can significantly shape the success of their actual performance (Tschannen-Moran and

Woolfolk Hoy 2001). Studies have shown that teachers with low self-efficacy often avoid activities they believe exceed their capacities, abstain from children who have difficulty learning, and use repeated traditional teaching methods. On the other hand, teachers with high self-efficacy are more inclined to expose children to challenging activities that help increase their success and have higher levels of planning and organization (Schunk 2014), which together can aid the application of drama activities in Kindergarten settings. In fact, education researchers argue that it is the perceived self-efficacy that enables teachers to successfully cope with tasks, obligations, and challenges related to the professional role (Perren et al. 2017).

Regarding its determinants, the results showed that prospective teachers' attitudes toward teaching as a profession significantly influenced their perceived self-efficacy. It should be noted that this study captured several affective, cognitive, and behavioral elements related to attitudes toward teaching. With that said, it can be inferred that prospective teachers who value the teaching profession, feel passionate about it, and view teaching as an honorable and esteemed profession are more likely to be self-efficacious, believing in their ability to effectively utilize drama activities in their teaching. This result is not surprising. In fact, educational researchers argue that in order to pragmatically transfer the knowledge and skills learned in undergraduate education, prospective teachers need to be passionate professionals who take responsibility for their own learning and hold positive attitudes toward their future teaching profession. It should be noted here that the cross-sectional nature of the current study cannot determine temporality. According to Yildirim (2021), while positive attitudes can affect self-efficacy, there might be a reciprocal relationship between the two variables, such that holding strong beliefs about one's own ability to successfully execute a teacher task can boost positive attitudes toward the teaching profession. Another important finding in this study is related to the significant role that communication skills play in shaping perceived self-efficacy. Prospective teachers who showed high communication skills tended to have significantly higher self-efficacy scores. The relationship supports previous research studies that found teachers' self-efficacy to be related to their communication skills (Arac 2018; Kanadlı 2017; Ozkan et al. 2014; Yildirim 2021). Providing a theoretical explanation for the relationship between communication skills and the development of self-efficacy is not, indeed, a straightforward task, nor it is a zero-order bivariate relationship (Eren 2006). Future research might benefit from considering potential mediators in this relationship in order to better explain, predict, and manipulate the desired outcomes.

5. Conclusions and Implications

Exploring prospective teachers' perceived self-efficacy in applying drama activities in kindergarten education early in their professional development is considered strategic, as these data provide important views on their abilities to manage classrooms and plan and evaluate effective learning-teaching processes. Further, this proactive approach can be strategic to handle the risks that may be associated with using drama activities in education. As the results revealed, limited resources, time constraints, children's unwillingness to participate, and difficulties in class control and learning outcomes evaluation are all issues that received agreement from participants as being potential challenges.

It is therefore important for faculty, education curricula, and teachers' trainers to recognize where self-efficacy in using drama comes from, what factors hinder it, and how to support it (Kanadlı 2017). This study helps fill this gap in the literature by investigating the relative contribution of prospective teachers' attitudes toward the teaching profession and communication skills to the variability in their perceived self-efficacy. Together, the findings from this study allow us to supply more in-depth information about the self-efficacy of prospective teachers in applying drama activities, which may also help design synergistic and combined programs that would yield larger effects.

Prompting teachers' self-efficacy is a multifaceted process. In a meta-analysis testing the relationship between teacher support and students' academic emotions, Lei et al. (2018)

concluded that teacher support was a significant predictor of students' academic positive emotions such as high self-confidence and self-efficacy, especially for university students. Komarraju et al. (2010) dug more into the type of teacher support that might be most influential and found that having respectful and approachable interactions with faculty members can significantly increase students' confidence in their academic life and ability to succeed in applying the learned skills in real-life situations.

An important finding to highlight here is that the completion of drama training did not seem to influence prospective teachers' self-efficacy in drama use among the current sample. This result is in contrast with those from previous research (Namdar and Kaya 2019), which showed that creative drama workshops conducted with prospective teachers had a positive effect on teachers' attitudes toward creative drama as well as their self-efficacy scores. This discrepancy warrants further exploration to unveil the effectiveness of drama courses in Jordanian universities. It also highlights the importance of considering factors other than academic preparations in shaping students' self-efficacy.

Given that self-efficacy beliefs begin to develop in the first days of learning (Bandura 1977), undergraduate education is a particularly important time to proactively intervene and help prospective teachers build professional self-efficacy. Attitudes are not inherited, but rather acquired and learned. Thus, study plans must be designed in a way that boosts positive attitudes and refines negative ones. This will not only positively influence academic success but also professional development (Alkhateeb 2013). Improving prospective teachers' communication skills is another pathway to support their self-efficacy. Kindergarten education curricula should foster students' interest and attitudes toward teaching and help them improve, learn, and use communication skills effectively.

Implications in Light of COVID-19

The global disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has affected day-to-day life and unsettled many services. In higher education, the impact was swift and profound, as educational institutions had to cope with unprecedented closures, distance learning, and rising issues related to academic integrity (Quacquarelli Symonds 2020). Over the period of the pandemic, several studies have been conducted showing that students worldwide are dramatically affected by the spread of COVID-19 and the subsequent closure of educational institutions, with many reporting a lack of motivation, negative attitudes toward learning online, and diminished self-efficacy (Hoffman and Miller 2020; Viner et al. 2020). The COVID-19 crisis brought the faculty's role into sharp focus. Faculty can improve their students' self-efficacy through verbal persuasion, acting as role models in handling the crisis of COVID-19 in an empowering way, and offering various opportunities for students to learn from their failures and thrive (Ferguson 2021; Kumar et al. 2021).

In their interesting article titled "Shot of love: The art of care in schools post disaster", O'Connor and Estellés (2021) discussed the unique role that drama had in helping teachers create a safe and enjoyable return to school. Their results revealed that for many teacher participants, it was impossible to adapt the pedagogical methods and rebuild a caring and loving student–teacher relationship without the drama activities. However, we maintain that measuring and managing the risk of using drama activities in Jordanian schools and similar contexts is an a priori step.

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