


Building Confidence and Fluency in English through Drama-based Learning

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A B S T R A C T

This study investigates the impact of drama-based activities on enhancing students' confidence, fluency, and speaking skills in an English Literature in ELT course. The research was conducted among sixth-semester students of the English Education program using a qualitative method. The data were collected through questionnaire and semi-structured interview. The findings revealed that the integration of drama activities significantly contributed to students' speaking performance by creating an engaging and expressive learning environment. It also boosted their self-confidence and reduced their speaking anxiety. This study suggests that incorporating drama into ELT classrooms can be a powerful pedagogical tool for language development.

Keywords: *Drama; Speaking Skills; Fluency; Confidence; Literature in ELT.*

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INTRODUCTION

Language learning is an essential part of connecting cultures and fostering global communication, with speaking being one of the most vital skills to master. For EFL learners, speaking fluency is often considered the ultimate goal, but it is very challenging and complex to attain. Near-native-like fluency, while impressive, may betray issues of identity and cultural authenticity (Jasuli & Adi, 2023). To help students overcome these barriers, educators have explored innovative and interactive teaching methods. Drama has proven to be one of the most effective tools in this area, giving students the opportunity to practice the language in a purposeful and engaging context. Research indicates that drama activities help to develop communication skills, motivate learners and encourage active participation (Mustafa, 2019; Alasmari & Alshae'el, 2020).

Another important advantage of drama-based learning is its ability to simulate authentic communication scenarios. Unlike traditional classroom exercises that often focus on isolated grammar or vocabulary drills, drama-based approaches in language learning offer numerous benefits for developing students' communication skills and cultural understanding. These methods create authentic scenarios that mirror real-life conversations, fostering meaningful interactions beyond traditional grammar drills (Astiandani & Mustofa, 2021). Additionally, drama encourages creativity and spontaneity in language use. By engaging in unscripted performances, students are pushed out of their comfort zones, leading to personal growth and improved communication skills (Becker, 2020; Bessadet, 2022). The less there is of hesitation due to the fear of making mistakes, the more there will be of fluency being natural.

In addition to language acquisition, drama also enhances other essential skills. Through playing roles and seeing scenarios from different points of view, students can enhance language learning as well as personal growth and social skills. Despite these advantages, implementing drama activities in EFL classrooms is not without challenges. Initially some students may be unwilling or too shy or anxious to perform in front of others. Teachers also need adequate training to design effective drama-based lessons that align with specific linguistic goals; they face challenges in implementing drama techniques, including text selection, activity design, and classroom execution (Ding, 2022). In the context of English Language Teaching (ELT), introducing drama into lessons provides a very practical and creative solution for students with a lack of oral communicative skills. The correlation of this study describes the writer's experience during the Literature in ELT course in fourth semester. The different drama performances afforded students authentic arenas for practicing their speaking skills in English. As a result of these activities, students were visibly more confident and fluent than before.

METHOD

Research Design

This study adopted a mixed-method approach, deploying both quantitative and qualitative techniques. In the quantitative aspect, students' mastery of their speaking competence and fluency was measured through structured questionnaires before and after engaging in drama-based activities. The qualitative component consisted of interviews or focus group discussions to obtain richer information regarding students' experiences, challenges, and perceptions regarding the influence of drama on their speaking abilities.

Participants

This study involved sixth-semester English Education students at Sriwijaya University. They were selected because they had experience with drama-based activities in their fourth semester. A structured questionnaire was administered to a larger group of students, followed by a smaller group of students (6–10 students) who were invited to participate in semi-structured interviews or focus group discussions.

Instruments

This study employed two main instruments: a questionnaire and an interview. The questionnaire data was framed in a descriptive qualitative approach to examine the students' perceptions of the development of their speaking skills through drama based activities while studying in the English Education Program at Sriwijaya University. The questionnaire included both open-ended and closed-ended items that inquired about students' self-perceived level of confidence and fluency prior to and following their participation in the drama activities, the specific drama activities in which they participated, and their general reflections on the process.

The closed-ended items included Likert-scale questions to assess perceptions regarding speaking confidence and fluency. Specifically, the response options were strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree. These response options were numerically coded, with 5 indicates a strong agreement and 1 indicates a strong disagreement. Moreover, open-ended questions were included to elaborate on their experiences and provide suggestions for changes. The questionnaire was distributed via WhatsApp in the form of a Google Form. The instrument included six categories which are provided in Table 1. In addition, interviews were conducted with a small group of participants to gather in-depth qualitative data about their experiences with drama activities. As a widely used method in social sciences and medical education research, interviews enable researchers to explore participants' experiences, perceptions, and opinions in detail (Peters & Halcomb, 2015; Elhami & Khoshnevisan, 2022; Knott et al., 2022; McGrath et al., 2018). To maintain focus and alignment with the research objectives, a structured set of key topics and corresponding questions had been prepared by the researcher.

Table 1. Questionnaire blueprint of students' preference of drama-based activity

No.	Indicator	Item Number
1	Speaking Confidence	1, 2, 3, 4
2	Speaking Fluency	5, 6, 7, 8
3	Speaking Anxiety	9, 10, 11
4	Drama Engagement	12, 13
5	Challenges Faced	14, 15, 16
6	Suggestion for Improvement	17, 18, 19, 20

Data Analysis

To ensure relevant and accurate findings, the data analysis method is selected based on the characteristics of the data. Quantitative analysis involves statistical techniques, while qualitative analysis employs methods like thematic analysis (Kiger & Varpio, 2020). Combining both approaches can provide a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. Questionnaire responses were analyzed through descriptive statistics to identify trends and patterns regarding students' confidence, fluency, and perceived improvements in speaking. Data from interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis. Commonalities were identified and grouped across the data, including themes such as motivation, speaking fears, or the effectiveness of drama activities. A synthesis of the results from both quantitative and qualitative analyses contributed to an integrated understanding of the impact of drama activities on students' speaking confidence, fluency, and oral proficiency in the English language.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Research Findings

To explore students' experiences with drama-based learning, a questionnaire was distributed to 44 participants. The results provided insights into students' perceptions, engagement, and personal growth through the drama process.

Result of the Questionnaire

The Likert-scale questions were analyzed using percentage distribution. The questions are organized into three tables: speaking confidence, speaking fluency, and speaking anxiety.

Table 2. Speaking Confidence

Questions	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I feel confident speaking English before drama activities.	2.3%	13.6%	38.6%	40.9%	4.5%
My confidence in speaking English improved after participating in drama activities.	0%	11.4%	9.1%	70.5%	9.1%
I feel more comfortable speaking English in class discussions after drama activities.	4.5%	6.8%	22.7%	59.1%	6.8%
Drama activities helped me overcome my fear of making mistakes while speaking.	2.3%	6.8%	6.8%	65.9%	18.2%

The first set in the survey focused on students' confidence in speaking English as it related to their experiences with drama activities. The table shows four statements regarding different aspects of speaking confidence. Before engaging in drama activities, only 4.5% of

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students strongly agreed, and 40.9% agreed that they felt confident speaking English. 38.6% of students stayed neutral, indicating that students generally lacked strong confidence to begin with. After participating in the drama-based learning, students reported a transition and growth in confidence. 70.5% agreed, and 9.1% strongly agreed that their confidence in speaking English had improved, and 65.9% agreed, and 18.2% strongly agreed that drama activities helped them overcome their fear of making mistakes while speaking, which indicated that the drama activity had a positive emotional impact.

Table 3. Speaking Fluency

Questions	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I could speak English smoothly before drama activities.	2.3%	18.2%	20.5%	47.7%	11.4%
My fluency in speaking English improved after drama activities.	0%	11.4%	25%	52.3%	11.4%
I can speak English with fewer pauses after participating in drama activities.	0%	13.6%	34.1%	43.2%	9.1%
Drama activities helped me improve my pronunciation and intonation.	2.3%	6.8%	18.2%	54.5%	18.2%

The second set of questions was designed to assess students' fluency in speaking English, primarily before and after engaging in drama activities. The results for all students indicated an overall improvement in. Before participating in drama, 11.4% of students strongly agreed and 47.73% agreed that they could speak in English fluently. Meanwhile, 20.5% were neutral and 20.5% disagreed. After the participating in drama, 52.3% agreed and 11.4% strongly agreed that their speaking fluency had improved so it is clear that students' perception of their fluency improved after the drama. In addition, when asked if they could speak English with fewer pauses after the drama activities, 43.2% agreed and 9.1% strongly agreed, however 34.1% were neutral reflecting the variability of their progress in this area.

Table 4. Speaking Anxiety

Questions	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I felt anxious speaking English in front of others before drama activities.	0%	20.5%	25%	43.2%	11.4%
I feel less anxious when speaking English after participating in drama activities.	4.5%	6.8%	38.6%	43.2%	6.8%
Drama activities helped me reduce my fear of being judged when speaking.	6.8%	9.1%	25%	47.7%	11.4%

The third set examined in the survey were students' speaking anxiety, in particular, how drama activities supported their ease of speaking while using English in front of others. Before engaging in drama activities, many respondents were anxious, with 43.2% agreed and 11.4% strongly agreed when asked if they felt nervous speaking English in front of others. This

suggests that while 25% were neutral, 20.5% disagreed, which indicates that the students who marked disagree reported mixed feelings about their previous anxiety. After engaging in drama activities, 43.2% agreed and 6.8% strongly agreed that they felt less anxious, while 38.6% marked neutral indicating that most students reported a decrease in anxiety, but that they might have needed more time or more support to notice any significant shift to ease the anxiety.

To measure students' engagement in drama-based learning activities, the questionnaire included a specific item that asked students to reflect on their level of participation during the process of the drama project. The responses were categorized into four levels: Very Active, Moderately Active, Occasionally Active, and Not Active at All. These categories allowed for a clearer interpretation of students' involvement based on their self-assessment.

Table 5. Drama Engagement

Participation Level	Frequency	Percentage
Very Active	21	47.7%
Moderately Active	14	31.8%
Occasionally Active	8	18.2%
Not Active at All	1	2.3%
Total	44	100%

The findings shown nearly half of the students (47.7%) considered themselves very active, while 31.8% were moderately active, indicating strong engagement throughout the activity.

To gain a deeper understanding of students' experiences with drama-based speaking activities, seven open-ended questions were posed to participants.

Challenges Faced While Speaking in Drama

Students frequently reported experiencing stage fright and nervousness as major obstacles. Many described difficulty projecting their voice sufficiently to be heard by the audience, especially in group performances where coordination was essential. One student remarked, "I have to speak so loud to be heard by the audience and coordinate with others," highlighting the physical and social demands of performance.

Difficult Aspects of Drama Activities

In addition to nervousness, students identified specific aspects of drama they found most difficult. Intonation and expression were commonly mentioned, as students had to convey the emotions and personalities of their characters authentically. One participant shared, "Playing into the character and bringing emotions was hard, especially when trying to act naturally." Memorization was another recurring difficulty, with students needing to balance learning their scripts while maintaining natural delivery.

Strategies to Overcome Challenges

Despite these difficulties, students employed various strategies to manage and overcome their challenges. The most frequently cited approach was regular rehearsal and practice, both individually and with peers. Many practiced their lines repeatedly, sometimes in front of a mirror or by recording themselves to improve delivery. One student explained, "I try to memorize what the sentence is, then say it out loud repeatedly until I feel comfortable." Peer collaboration was also important, as students gave each other feedback and support.

Aspects That Helped Improve Speaking Skills

Students agreed that drama activities helped improve their fluency, pronunciation, and public speaking confidence. Many noted that adopting a character allowed them to express themselves more freely and naturally, which reduced self-consciousness. One student remarked, "Drama helps speaking skills when you play a role and really get into the character."

Suggested Support or Strategies for Confidence

To further enhance the effectiveness of drama activities, students suggested the inclusion of additional support measures. These included more practice time before performances, warm-up sessions to prepare the voice and body, and feedback sessions to guide improvement. Importantly, several students emphasized the need for a supportive and non-judgmental environment, where mistakes are accepted as part of the learning process.

Recommendations to Improve Drama-Based Activities

Students also offered constructive recommendations for improving drama activities in the future. Many suggested reducing the stress and pressure associated with performances by increasing rehearsal time and breaking tasks into smaller, manageable parts. Incorporating more improvisation exercises was frequently mentioned as a way to build spontaneous speaking skills and quick thinking. One student encouraged future participants, “Don’t be afraid of making mistakes – that’s part of the journey and learning.”

Advice for Future Students

The students shared encouraging advice for future participants in drama activities. The overall message was to relax, trust the process, and embrace mistakes as natural steps toward improvement. One student stated, “Drama is all about trying, learning, and speaking. Don’t be afraid to make mistakes. Support your friends and enjoy the moment!” This positive outlook highlighted the role of drama not only as a language learning tool but also as a confidence-building and community-strengthening experience.

Result of Students’ Interview

Seven students participated in semi-structured interviews to provide deeper insights into their experiences, perceptions, and reflections on drama-based speaking activities conducted during the fourth semester. The interviews revealed rich and nuanced understandings, which were carefully analyzed and organized into key thematic areas.

Experience with Drama Activities

Students’ experiences with drama were described as varied but predominantly positive. Many emphasized the enjoyment and engagement they felt through drama, appreciating the opportunity to actively participate and express themselves creatively. One student shared, “Drama was one of the most memorable and meaningful experiences for me. Although I was nervous at first, we improved together as a class and supported each other” (Student 7).

Development of Speaking Confidence

A dominant theme was the significant boost in confidence that students experienced as a result of drama activities. Repeated practice, performing live in front of audiences, and embodying characters forced students to confront and gradually overcome their fears of public speaking. One student explained how the role of narrator demanded loud and clear speech, which developed confidence in voice projection: “I was shy before, but narrating the story loudly and clearly helped me become more confident in speaking English” (Student 5).

Enhancement of Fluency

Many students reported noticeable improvements in their speaking fluency through drama. These improvements were attributed to the necessity of repeated rehearsals, learning new vocabulary relevant to their scripts, and the challenge of speaking with natural intonation and emotion. One participant noted, “Practicing and learning new words for the drama helped me speak English more fluently, especially when I had to perform long narrations” (Student 5).

Managing Anxiety through Drama

The interviews revealed that drama activities contributed to a reduction in anxiety related to performance and public speaking for most students. Several participants described initial nervousness and fear but emphasized how extensive rehearsal, supportive peers, and repeated exposure to performing helped them manage these feelings. One student recounted,

“Drama helped me face my anxiety because I realized making mistakes was okay and everyone supported me” (Student 1).

Challenges Faced

Students faced a variety of challenges in their drama experience. The memorization of lines, maintaining emotional authenticity, and managing stage presence were commonly cited difficulties. One student said, “When I want to be a perfect one, even small mistakes disturb everything. I had to learn to stay focused even if I made a mistake” (Student 3).

Supportive Aspect and Skill Development

Students identified several aspects of the drama activities that effectively supported their speaking development. Performing in front of live audiences, receiving constructive feedback from peers and lecturers, focusing on pronunciation, intonation, body language, and facial expressions all contributed significantly to their progress. One student emphasized the value of peer and lecturer feedback, stating, “The feedback session helped me a lot. My peers and lecturer told me if I mispronounced something or said something that didn’t match the character” (Student 2).

Long-Term Impact and Transferability

Most students affirmed that the confidence and communication skills gained through drama have continued to benefit their academic and personal lives. One student explained, “The skills I learned from drama still help me in presentations and group discussions. I’m more confident and expressive now” (Student 4).

Suggestion for Future Improvement

The students provided thoughtful recommendations to enhance drama activities further. Suggestions included increasing the amount of improvisation to foster spontaneity and critical thinking, ensuring more equitable distribution of speaking parts so all students have adequate opportunities, extending rehearsal time for deeper preparation, and incorporating more natural, everyday English into scripts for relevance and accessibility. Feedback mechanisms were also highlighted as essential for continuous improvement. One student suggested, “More lines for everyone and regular feedback would help us practice more and improve faster” (Student 6).

Discussion

Derived from the data collected through questionnaires, open-ended responses, and interviews, the majority of students have positive attitudes toward using drama to learn English. These outcomes are consistent with earlier research that has underscored drama as an effective means to develop communication skills and increase learner confidence. According to Baldwin and Gałazka (2021), drama provides a dynamic space where learners are encouraged to communicate, while also promoting important life skills such as critical thinking, creativity, and collaboration. In terms of speaking fluency, the results align with Bora (2020), who found that drama-based approaches and role-play activities can significantly enhance EFL learners’ speaking skills. These methods develop natural spontaneous speaking practice which helps fluency and natural conversation.

Challenges faced by students in this study, such as nervousness, limited preparation time, or minimal speaking roles, are also commonly reported in similar contexts. Learners often struggle with stage fright and memorization during drama, but despite challenges such as stage fright and memorization, drama experiences can be transformed into growth opportunities when supported by proper feedback and peer collaboration (Mardiani & Hanifah, 2023; Moncayo Noroña et al., 2023).

The interview data in this study further reinforced previous findings from studies such as Alam et al. (2023), which argued the use of role-plays in drama pedagogy contributes to students’ overall communication skills, including verbal expression and non-verbal cues such as gestures and facial expressions. Moreover, students’ suggestions for improving drama-based

learning, such as incorporating more improvisation, providing equal speaking opportunities, and using everyday English, reflect recommendations made by other scholars. For instance, Nfor (2020) state that dialogues using everyday conversational language through role-playing and role-creating exercises can facilitate language learning and improve oral communication skills.

To summarize, the results from this study support existing literature that has already accepted the educational significance of drama in the context of teaching English. Drama as a medium for improving learner's confidence, fluency and communicative skills has been verified, although there are some aspects which need to be revisited in greater detail taking into account the fixed time and unequal roles as well. These findings indicate that with thoughtful planning and inclusive design activities, drama can serve as an effective and meaningful tool in developing speaking skills among language learners.

CONCLUSION

Drawing on the analysis and interpretation of the data presented in the previous chapter, it can be determined that students have positive perceptions of the use of drama-based learning activities. All students regarded their involvement with drama as beneficial of their development of English-speaking skills, particularly related to fluency, pronunciation, confidence, and expression. Many students acknowledged that role play in drama allowed them to speak more naturally and confidently, helping to reduce anxiety and fear of making mistakes when speaking in public. Despite facing several challenges, such as nerves, memory, and expressing emotion, students were able to manage these challenges and improve their practice with regular performance opportunities and collaboration with peers, mentoring and feedback from lecturers, support and encouragement, and reassurance from a supportive, non-judgmental environment. In addition, many students stated that the speaking skills they developed through drama improved their academic presentation and discussion experiences as well. This suggests the use of drama activities may also have a long-term effect on students' communication competence and confidence in public speaking.

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