






A Comprehensive Review of the Impact of Drama-Based Pedagogy on English-Speaking Proficiency

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Received: 05 January 2025 | Received in Revised Form: 30 March 2025 | Accepted: 31 March 2025

APA Citation:

Hua, X., Hashim, H., Jamaludin, K. A. (2024). A Comprehensive Review of the Impact of Drama-Based Pedagogy on English-Speaking Proficiency *Eurasian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 10(1), 275-282.
Doi: <https://doi.org/10.32601/ejal.11123>

Abstract

The present study examines the influence of drama-based pedagogy on English-speaking proficiency. This pedagogical approach immerses students in experiential learning through role-playing, improvisation, and acting-based instruction, thereby fostering engagement with authentic language use. The research investigates the role of drama-based pedagogy in enhancing language learners' fluency, vocabulary acquisition, pronunciation, interest, and self-confidence in English learning. Existing literature consistently highlights the positive impact of drama-based pedagogy on English-speaking proficiency. The primary conclusion drawn is that integrating drama-based pedagogy into language instruction significantly contributes to the development of speaking skills and overall English proficiency. Furthermore, the study indicates that this approach enhances student participation and resilience in learning English, leading to meaningful learning outcomes. However, challenges such as limited resources, teacher resistance, and difficulties in assessment hinder its widespread implementation. Despite these challenges, drama-based pedagogy offers a more balanced and inclusive English language learning experience. The review recommends further research and pedagogical innovation to advance English language teaching through drama-based methodologies.

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Keywords: Drama-Based Pedagogy; English-Speaking; Fluency; Vocabulary; Pronunciation; Interest in English Learning; Self-Confidence.

Introduction

In the contemporary globalised world, proficiency in English is increasingly essential for academic, professional, and social success (Shintasiwi & Anwar, 2021). As a widely recognised international lingua franca, English facilitates access to numerous opportunities, including higher education, professional advancement, and cultural integration (Liu, 2022). Mastery of the English language enables individuals to communicate effectively, collaborate efficiently, and adapt to diverse environments in an ever-evolving global landscape (Katemba & Grace, 2023). Amidst the ongoing process of globalisation, cross-border communication has become more frequent, further reinforcing the significance of English as the most widely utilised medium

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.32601/ejal.11123>

of interaction. Enhancing students' spoken English proficiency aligns with both societal progress and individual development (Alfarwan, 2024; Liu, 2022).

According to Dutton & Rushton (2022), as the necessity for English language proficiency grows, educators and researchers have increasingly explored innovative teaching methodologies to enhance language acquisition. One such approach is drama-based pedagogy, which offers a dynamic and interactive platform for students to develop their English-speaking skills within a supportive and creative environment. This pedagogical method incorporates various dramatic elements, including songs, role-playing, bodily movements, and scriptwriting, to facilitate the comprehension of instructional content. Characterised by engagement, authenticity, and experiential learning, the integration of educational drama is anticipated to foster students' interest in English learning and improve their spoken proficiency (Shafiei, 2022; Vaishnavi & Ajit, 2023).

This study aims to critically assess the impact of drama-based pedagogy on English-speaking proficiency. Drawing on existing research and literature, it seeks to evaluate the effectiveness of this pedagogical approach in enhancing various aspects of spoken English, including grammar, fluency, comprehension, vocabulary, and pronunciation. Additionally, the study will explore the theoretical foundations of drama-based pedagogy and identify key factors influencing its efficacy in language education settings. The review will be conducted through the following steps: first, it will highlight the significance of English-speaking proficiency in the contemporary globalised world. Subsequently, it will outline the theoretical framework of drama-based pedagogy and its potential role in facilitating English language acquisition. The study will then consider language proficiency as the dependent variable and systematically examine the impact of drama-based pedagogy on English-speaking skills, discussing its theoretical underpinnings, empirical evidence, and practical implications. Finally, the paper will summarise its key findings and discuss their implications for language education practice and research. This review aspires to contribute to the body of literature on effective English teaching methodologies while providing valuable insights for educators, researchers, and policymakers seeking to develop innovative and interactive approaches to English language instruction.

Drama-Based Pedagogy

Drama-based pedagogy originates from educators, theatre practitioners, and theorists in theatre education (Ranzau & Horowitz, 2017). Developed in the United States, it views teachers as artists who shape learning through their unique social and cultural experiences (Dawson & Lee, 2014). Its growth aligns with the shift towards student-centred experiential learning (Dawson & Lee, 2018). Drama-based pedagogy encompasses various activities, including acting, reader drama, creative drama, and dramaturgy (Ranzau & Horowitz, 2017). It also includes games and pantomimes (Bsharat & Barahmeh, 2020). In language education, it involves students acting as themselves or others in fictional scenarios (Holden, 1981). Drama-based pedagogy integrates classroom play without focusing solely on performance (Dawson & Lee, 2018). While definitions vary, it is broadly an experiential learning method using drama exercises to enhance teaching. It includes acting, storytelling, mime, and other strategies to expand learners' knowledge. Drama-based pedagogy, a subset of this pedagogy, fosters engagement through immersive participation (Altweissi, 2022). As an emerging approach, it employs drama techniques to enhance learning, particularly in language and communication skills. Drama-based pedagogy originates from theatre in education, integrating theatrical elements with educational objectives to create an immersive learning environment. Its growing adoption reflects educators' recognition of active, multi-sensory learning in enhancing teaching outcomes. Over time, it has incorporated insights from educational psychology, sociocultural theory, and constructivism. Despite variations in its definition, drama-based pedagogy consistently emphasises the use of drama elements as tools for student-centred learning rather than as an end goal. It involves drama techniques, patterns, and activities to engage students, fostering active participation to enhance subject knowledge and skills. This study defines drama-based pedagogy as a teaching approach that stimulates learning interest through drama-based methods, aiming to improve subject comprehension rather than performance skills. Based on this framework, the paper analyses its effectiveness in enhancing students' English-speaking proficiency.

Theoretical Frameworks Supporting Drama-Based Pedagogy

Several theoretical frameworks support the effectiveness of drama-based pedagogy in enhancing language acquisition and English proficiency. These theories explain how dramatic activities contribute to improving oral English skills. Key foundations including Krashen's Input Hypothesis (1982), Swain's Output Hypothesis (1985), and Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, particularly the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (1978).

Krashen's Input Hypothesis

In the early 1980s, Krashen (1982), an American language educator, introduced the concept of comprehensible input within his Monitor Theory, positioning it as the central element of second language

acquisition. Krashen (1982) further outlined four essential characteristics of effective language input: it must be comprehensible, engaging, relevant, non-reliant on explicit syntax instruction, and abundant in quantity.

Firstly, comprehensible input is fundamental to language acquisition. Krashen asserts that for learners to acquire language effectively, they must receive comprehensible input, as incomprehensible input merely functions as noise. Language acquisition occurs when learners can grasp the conveyed information, internalise it, and subsequently enhance their communicative abilities. Therefore, comprehensible input forms the foundation of the Input Hypothesis. Conversely, if learning materials lack coherence, logical progression, or engaging content, learners may struggle to develop interest. Even if the materials are understandable, disinterest in passive language input can hinder language acquisition. Effective teaching should therefore employ engaging methodologies and dynamic classroom activities to capture learners' attention, stimulate interest, and facilitate meaningful learning. Secondly, language input should not rely solely on grammatical instruction. Krashen critiques the traditional grammar-translation method, arguing that grammatical competence emerges through exposure to sufficient comprehensible input rather than explicit grammar instruction. Language input should not be fragmented into isolated grammar points but should instead reflect natural communication, immersing students in authentic language use. Lastly, learners must receive ample language input to support their acquisition and proficiency development.

Krashen's Input Hypothesis has significantly influenced foreign language teaching, emphasising a hierarchical and progressive approach to comprehensible input. According to this hypothesis, learners must receive extensive language exposure, akin to their native language acquisition, to fully grasp linguistic structures. Drama-based pedagogy facilitates this process by offering language input slightly beyond learners' current proficiency, encouraging gradual development. Drama-based activities create an authentic language-learning environment, requiring comprehension within real and dynamic contexts. Through dialogues and scripts, learners engage with language at a level just beyond their own, prompting them to interpret meaning and, consequently, enhance their linguistic abilities.

Swain's Output Hypothesis

Swain (1985), a Canadian linguist, conducted the well-known immersion experiment to demonstrate that the Input Hypothesis alone is insufficient for successful second language acquisition without extensive opportunities for comprehensible and accurate output. The immersion approach places learners in a controlled environment where they use the target language in all aspects of daily life, minimising the influence of their native language on the acquisition process. This method reinforces the necessity of active language production alongside input to achieve proficiency. Swain (1985) found that while learners can receive unlimited language input, they cannot fully acquire target language proficiency without ample opportunities for output. She argued that limited language production hinders fluency and accuracy, as learners lack practice in expressing themselves. Social and cognitive constraints further impede coherent and appropriate communication. To develop second language proficiency, learners must engage in both comprehensible input and extensive output. Swain emphasised that cognitive and emotional growth occurs through active language production, such as speaking and writing, which helps refine thinking and fosters cross-cultural understanding.

Swain's Output Hypothesis complements Krashen's theory by emphasising that language acquisition occurs through active production. Speaking in meaningful contexts, particularly with authentic materials, helps learners consolidate knowledge, identify gaps, and receive feedback. Engaging in speaking activities enhances language development and improves English-speaking proficiency by fostering practice and self-expression. Building on the Input and Output Hypotheses, learners require comprehensible input that interests them while also producing language to enhance practical usage. Oral classroom activities are crucial in balancing input and output. Drama-based pedagogy facilitates language production, encouraging practice, feedback, and refinement. Through drama activities, students actively use English, identifying gaps while conveying messages or emotions, thus reinforcing meaningful language use.

Socio-Cultural Theory and Zone of Proximal Development

Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory highlights the significance of social interactions and cultural contexts in cognitive development and learning. It asserts that learning is inherently social, occurring through collaboration, dialogue, and shared experiences. This theory views learning as a structured, practical social process essential for developing higher cognitive functions. Vygotsky posited that language serves as a regulatory tool, enabling learners to internalise external knowledge through social interaction. Mediation theory offers valuable insights for foreign language teaching by emphasising that learning with others fosters cognitive development. Appropriate cognitive support from peers can expand problem-solving abilities. In this study, peer conversation functions as the primary mediator in report preparation. Knowledge acquisition and skill development rely not only on individual effort but also on social interactions. Active participation in discussions enables learners to internalise external ideas, gaining new knowledge and perspectives that enhance their development.

Sociocultural theory comprises four key components: mediation, scaffolding, internalisation, and the zone of proximal development (ZPD). A fundamental element of this theory is mediation, which facilitates learners'

self-awareness and establishes a connection between their cognitive processes and the social environment. Drama-based pedagogy frequently incorporates tasks that require collaboration with peers or teachers. For instance, while students may struggle to sustain a conversation independently, they are more likely to succeed in a group or paired setting, thereby engaging within their ZPD. The interactive nature of drama activities ensures that students consistently operate within their ZPD, optimising their learning potential.

Originally a construction tool, scaffolding was later adapted to education to describe the support provided by teachers or more capable peers in assisting learners with new or challenging knowledge. This process is dynamic, requiring adjustments based on learners' needs—support is offered when difficulties arise and gradually reduced as learners gain independence. In educational research, scaffolding is frequently applied in group presentation preparation, fostering a sense of competence among less proficient members and enhancing their engagement with the task. By integrating these theoretical perspectives, this study contends that drama-based pedagogy can serve as an effective medium for language acquisition when appropriately implemented. Such activities offer both comprehensible input and essential output while situating learning within the learner's ZPD and sociocultural environment. The interaction of these theories provides valuable insights into the diverse advantages of drama-based pedagogy in enhancing English proficiency. Instructional approaches grounded in drama-based pedagogy facilitate the practical application of these theoretical principles, aligning with the sociability inherent in Vygotskian theory. Activities structured around play frequently position students within their ZPD, enabling them to engage at an appropriate level while continuously being encouraged to progress. Collectively, these theoretical frameworks provide a robust foundation for understanding the principles and implementation of drama-based pedagogy. Applying these concepts in teaching enables educators to harness the potential of immersive methodologies, fostering deeper engagement and enriching language acquisition while enhancing overall comprehension.

Methodology

A systematic literature review was conducted to thoroughly analyse the impact of drama-based pedagogy on English language learning. The following section outlines the methodology employed in this review, detailing the approach used for data collection, selection, and analysis.

Search Strategies and Databases

The literature search was carried out using electronic databases, including ERIC, PsycINFO, Education Source, Google Scholar, and CNKI. A combination of keywords and search terms, such as "drama-based pedagogy," "drama in education," "creative drama," "English-speaking," "speaking," and "oral," along with related variants, was employed to identify relevant academic publications, research studies, and articles.

Inclusion Criteria

Articles were selected based on pre-determined inclusion criteria to ensure both relevance and academic rigour. The criteria applied were as follows:

1. **Relevance to the Topic:** The study must focus on the application of drama-based pedagogy in language education and its impact on English-speaking proficiency.
2. **Type of Publication:** Eligible sources include journal articles, conference proceedings, master's and doctoral theses, and other academic publications.
3. **Date Range:** Only studies published within the last 10 years were considered to capture recent developments and insights in the field.

Article Selection and Evaluation

The initial search yielded a substantial number of articles, which were first screened based on the relevance of their titles and abstracts to identify highly pertinent studies. Full-text articles that met the inclusion criteria were then retrieved and thoroughly examined. Each study was evaluated according to its theoretical framework, research design, methodology, findings, and overall relevance to the objectives of the review.

Data Synthesis and Analysis

The key findings, themes, and insights from the selected articles are synthesised and analysed to identify patterns, trends, and gaps within the literature. The results of this analysis are structured thematically to provide a comprehensive understanding of the impact of drama-based pedagogy on English-speaking proficiency.

Limitations and Biases

To ensure methodological rigour, potential limitations and biases are acknowledged.

1. **Temporal Limitations:** This review focuses on studies published within the past decade, potentially overlooking older yet significant research and findings.

2. Selection Bias: Despite stringent inclusion criteria, subjectivity in article selection and evaluation may introduce bias.
3. Restricted Scope: The study examines only the impact of drama-based pedagogy on oral English proficiency, excluding its effects on other language skills such as reading and listening.

Recognising these limitations is crucial when interpreting the findings and conclusions of this review. While these constraints are acknowledged, the study offers a comprehensive examination of the implications of drama-based pedagogy for English language learning and speaking proficiency.

Impact of Drama-Based Pedagogy on English-Speaking Proficiency

Articles from CNKI published between 2014 and 2023 were searched, screened, and filtered to exclude those with low relevance. A total of 51 relevant papers were identified, comprising 33 academic journal articles, one conference paper, and 17 master's theses, with no doctoral theses available. Although research on drama-based pedagogy in English teaching in China emerged relatively late, it has expanded rapidly. The number of published studies surged between 2017 and 2021 before stabilising in 2022, indicating that drama-based pedagogy remains a significant topic in China's educational research. Studies on its impact on English-speaking proficiency began increasing in 2015, peaking in 2018 and 2019 before reaching a steady level.

Additionally, a search of electronic databases such as ERIC, Education Source, and Google Scholar for studies published between 2014 and 2023 yielded 45 relevant papers after excluding those with low relevance. These included 38 journal articles, four master's theses, and three doctoral theses. Among the 97 analysed articles, the research encompasses nearly all educational stages, including one study on kindergarten, 33 on primary education, 17 on junior high school, 13 on high school, 30 on higher education, and four on other categories. The focus of drama-based pedagogy varies across educational levels: primary schools emphasise fostering students' interest, junior and senior high schools concentrate on building a solid language knowledge base, while universities prioritise the application of language skills and the development of comprehensive abilities. These studies can be classified into two main categories: empirical research and review articles. Of the total, 61 are empirical studies, while 36 are review articles. A review of the literature indicates a consensus on the effectiveness of drama-based pedagogy in enhancing English-speaking proficiency. Most studies examine its impact on language fluency, vocabulary acquisition, pronunciation, and learners' confidence and interest, while a smaller number explore its effects on grammar, motivation, and student engagement. This review synthesises key findings from selected representative studies to provide a comprehensive analysis.

Effectiveness of Drama-Based Pedagogy in Improving English-Speaking Proficiency

The existing literature consistently underscores the positive influence of drama-based pedagogy on English-speaking proficiency. Numerous studies have demonstrated that integrating drama techniques into language instruction contributes to substantial improvements in learners' speaking abilities and overall language proficiency. Additionally, this approach enhances learners' interest in studying English. Impact on Language Fluency: Drama-based pedagogy immerses learners in authentic language use through role-playing, improvisation, and performance activities. As highlighted in the research of [Nguyen \(2023\)](#), [Ortiz Cifuentes \(2022\)](#), [Bravo Valdés \(2021\)](#), [Kim & Park, 2022](#), and [Pishkar, Moinzadeh, & Dabaghi \(2017\)](#), active participation in language-rich contexts fosters fluency in English speaking, as evidenced by increased oral proficiency and spontaneous language production. Impact on Vocabulary Acquisition: According to [Allder \(2023\)](#), [Akinradewo \(2022\)](#), [Liu \(2022\)](#), and [Ortiz Cifuentes \(2022\)](#), drama-based pedagogy facilitates vocabulary development by exposing learners to diverse linguistic input in contextually meaningful situations. Through encounters with new words and expressions in authentic settings, learners expand their vocabulary and gain a more profound understanding of word meanings and usage.

Impact on Pronunciation: Research conducted by [Bravo Valdés \(2021\)](#), [Akinradewo \(2022\)](#) and [Datskiv \(2024\)](#) indicates that drama-based pedagogy provides students with opportunities to practise intonation and pronunciation, demonstrating its effectiveness in enhancing students' articulation and phonetic accuracy. Impact on Interest in Learning English and Self-Confidence: Confidence in this context primarily refers to learners' confidence in speaking English. As evidenced in the studies of [Liu \(2022\)](#), [Ortiz Cifuentes \(2022\)](#), [Bravo Valdés \(2021\)](#), [Turgut \(2019\)](#), [Heljeberg \(2019\)](#) and [Ananto & Rusmiati \(2018\)](#), engagement in drama activities encourages students to use the target language, and over time, their confidence in both learning and speaking English improves significantly. Impact on Motivation and Engagement: Research by [Mugiraneza et al. \(2024\)](#), [Kara \(2022\)](#), [Liu \(2022\)](#), [Akyüz & Tanış \(2020\)](#) and [Man et al. \(2019\)](#) suggests that incorporating drama-based pedagogy into primary school English instruction is more effective than traditional teaching methods in stimulating students' interest in learning English. This is reflected in increased awareness of language learning, heightened motivation to use English, and greater classroom engagement. However, these studies do not provide detailed analyses of how motivation and engagement evolved, instead offering general assertions regarding their improvement.

Challenges and Barriers in Implementing Drama-Based Pedagogy

The implementation of drama-based pedagogy in language education, despite its potential advantages, presents several challenges and obstacles:

Limited Resources: The availability of resources, including time, funding, and materials, can significantly restrict the adoption of drama-based pedagogy, particularly in educational settings with constrained resources (Kara, 2022; Liu, 2022).

Teacher Resistance: Some educators may be reluctant to integrate drama-based pedagogy into their teaching practices due to unfamiliarity, insufficient training, or a lack of confidence in applying drama techniques within the classroom. Managing the timing of drama activities, maintaining classroom discipline, and balancing lesson preparation with curricular demands present additional challenges for teachers. Addressing these concerns requires sustained support, professional development, and an appreciation of the pedagogical value of drama in enhancing language learning outcomes (Kara, 2022; Liu, 2022; Manabe, Hwang, & Chuang, 2023). **Assessment Challenges:** Evaluating learning outcomes in drama-based pedagogy remains complex due to its emphasis on experiential and process-oriented learning. The development of appropriate assessment tools and criteria that accurately capture the multidimensional aspects of language proficiency fostered through drama-based approaches is crucial in determining their effectiveness (Liu, 2022; Ortiz Cifuentes, 2022). Despite these challenges, addressing the factors influencing the success of drama-based pedagogy and mitigating barriers to its implementation can enhance its potential to improve English-speaking proficiency and facilitate meaningful language learning experiences.

Recommendations

Based on the review findings, several recommendations are proposed for integrating drama-based pedagogy into English language education programmes and teacher training initiatives. When introducing drama-based pedagogy, it is essential to align it with school-based English instruction. English lessons incorporating drama-based pedagogy should not only be engaging but also structured, high-quality, and efficient. Teachers must explore a wide range of materials to enhance student learning, with drama resources primarily aligning with school English textbooks and supplemented by extracurricular materials. Academic performance must remain a priority, particularly for junior and senior high school students, where instructional strategies should align with key examination topics and core knowledge areas. Educators should enhance their proficiency in employing drama-based pedagogy in English-speaking instruction by strengthening lesson design skills, selecting appropriate materials, and ensuring thorough lesson preparation. Lesson planning should cater to both general and specific learner needs, incorporating differentiated instructional strategies. Additionally, teachers must refine their ability to deliver lessons effectively, structure classroom activities efficiently, and manage time appropriately. Improving assessment methods, adopting diverse evaluation strategies, and ensuring a comprehensive approach to student learning assessment are also vital for optimising the impact of drama-based pedagogy.

Fostering communication among teachers is crucial for expanding knowledge of drama-based pedagogy and encouraging self-directed learning. Professional development should include studying both drama-based pedagogy and broader teaching theories to reinforce pedagogical competence. Targeted training should also be prioritised in teacher education programmes, incorporating drama-based pedagogy literacy and raising awareness of its benefits. Schools should invite industry experts to deliver lectures and experienced educators to provide guidance, while also expanding access to external training opportunities and establishing research teams focused on drama-based pedagogy. Collaboration with both internal and external stakeholders is essential for establishing a comprehensive evaluation system. Developing and refining assessment standards for students engaged in drama-based learning, alongside a structured evaluation framework for teachers employing these methods, will help ensure consistency and effectiveness in the application of drama-based pedagogy.

Future Research Directions

Despite the expanding body of research on drama-based pedagogy and its influence on English-speaking proficiency, several gaps remain that require further exploration. Studies across various educational stages highlight that drama-based pedagogy not only enhances students' English-speaking skills but also boosts their interest, self-confidence, motivation, and classroom engagement. However, there is a lack of systematic research and statistical analysis on the latter two aspects. Additionally, existing studies primarily focus on urban and well-resourced educational settings, with limited research on the impact of drama-based pedagogy on rural students' English-speaking proficiency. This represents a significant gap that warrants further investigation. Assessment of speaking proficiency typically includes grammar, vocabulary, comprehension, pronunciation, and fluency, yet few studies have specifically evaluated which aspects of speaking are most

improved through drama-based pedagogy. Future research should explore these dimensions in greater depth to provide a more comprehensive understanding of its effectiveness. Addressing these research gaps will enable educators, researchers, and policymakers to refine language education practices, contributing to ongoing advancements in the field.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this comprehensive review has underscored the significant impact of drama-based pedagogy on enhancing English-speaking proficiency in language education. The analysis of relevant literature highlights its effectiveness in improving language fluency, vocabulary acquisition, pronunciation, interest in learning English, and self-confidence among learners, with some studies also noting its influence on motivation and engagement. These findings hold valuable implications for educators, curriculum developers, and policymakers aiming to enhance language teaching and learning outcomes. Integrating drama-based pedagogy into language instruction allows educators to create dynamic and engaging learning experiences tailored to the diverse needs of students. This approach fosters active engagement, collaboration, and creativity while simultaneously supporting the development of essential language skills and socio-emotional competencies, both of which are crucial for success in a globalised society. The importance of drama-based pedagogy as an effective language teaching strategy is undeniable. Its full potential should be explored to maximise its benefits in language education. The interactive nature of this approach provides English language learners with an authentic and immersive learning experience, strengthening their skills and confidence. Ultimately, drama-based pedagogy offers a more effective language teaching method, enhancing instructional efficacy and equipping learners with the confidence needed to become proficient English communicators.

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