

Drama-based instruction in EFL classrooms: Pedagogical practices in secondary and tertiary education

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Abstract

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Drama-based instruction is widely recognized as an effective approach in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning, particularly in enhancing communicative competence and learner engagement. However, its implementation in secondary and tertiary education remains inconsistent, and existing studies are often fragmented and context-specific. This study aims to synthesize recent literature on the roles, impacts, and challenges of drama-based learning in secondary and tertiary EFL classrooms. Using a qualitative library research design, this study analyzed 15 peer-reviewed journal articles and conference proceedings published between 2020 and 2025 through thematic content analysis. The findings indicate that drama-based instruction supports language development, especially in improving speaking fluency, pronunciation, and communicative competence, while also enhancing learner motivation, confidence, creativity, and collaboration. Nevertheless, challenges such as limited instructional time, large class sizes, insufficient teacher training, and students' reluctance to perform persist. The study highlights the pedagogical value of drama-based instruction and calls for greater institutional support, teacher professional development, and flexible curriculum design to optimize its implementation in EFL classrooms.

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1. Introduction

In recent years, the integration of innovative and interactive teaching strategies has become a major concern in English language education. Traditional language teaching methods that focus primarily on grammar instruction and textbook-based learning have been widely criticized for limiting students' opportunities to use language meaningfully in authentic communicative contexts. As a result, many learners, particularly in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) settings, experience low motivation, reduced confidence,

and limited communicative competence, especially in speaking and listening skills (Komul, 2023). These challenges highlight the need for alternative pedagogical approaches that actively engage learners and promote meaningful language use in the classroom.

One instructional approach that has gained increasing attention in the field of English language teaching (ELT) is drama-based learning. Drama, as a form of performing art, integrates spoken language with body movement, facial expression, and emotional engagement to convey meaning (Alasmari & Alshae'el, 2020). In educational contexts, drama provides learners with opportunities to practice English in realistic and meaningful situations through activities such as role-play, improvisation, simulations, and scripted performances. These activities encourage students to use English not merely as an academic subject, but as a tool for communication, collaboration, and self-expression (Safura et al., 2025).

From a linguistic perspective, numerous studies have demonstrated that drama-based instruction supports the development of key language skills, particularly speaking and listening, while also enhancing vocabulary acquisition and pronunciation accuracy. The use of repeated, contextualized, and purposeful language in drama activities enables learners to develop fluency and communicative competence more naturally than traditional instructional approaches (Mahayanti et al., 2025). By engaging in meaningful interaction, students are able to internalize language forms and functions in ways that are closely aligned with real-life communication.

Beyond linguistic gains, drama-based learning contributes significantly to learners' affective and social development. Drama activities have been shown to reduce learners' anxiety and increase confidence, as students communicate through roles or characters rather than as themselves, which encourages greater risk-taking and classroom participation (Bessadet, 2022). In addition, drama promotes motivation, collaboration, empathy, and cultural awareness, as learners must interpret characters, understand social and cultural contexts, and respond appropriately to diverse communicative situations. Collaborative performance tasks further foster creativity, critical thinking, teamwork, and problem-solving skills, making drama a holistic pedagogical approach suitable for secondary and tertiary education contexts.

Despite its documented benefits, the implementation of drama in English language classrooms remains inconsistent. Teachers often face challenges related to limited instructional time, insufficient training, curriculum constraints, and uncertainty about effective drama integration (Alharbi, 2022). Moreover, although a growing number of empirical studies have examined drama-based instruction, existing research is largely context-specific and fragmented. There is a notable lack of qualitative synthesis or library-based studies that systematically integrate recent findings on the linguistic, motivational, and social contributions of drama in EFL contexts. In particular, limited attention has been given to the role of drama in fostering social skills and learner

motivation at the secondary and tertiary education levels, and research findings across different educational and cultural contexts remain inconsistent.

Therefore, this study aims to address these gaps by conducting a qualitative library research that synthesizes recent scholarly literature on drama-based approaches in English language learning. Focusing on secondary and tertiary EFL contexts, this study seeks to examine (1) the role of drama in supporting language acquisition, (2) its impact on students' motivation and social skill development, and (3) the pedagogical contributions and challenges of implementing drama-based activities in English language classrooms. By synthesizing academic literature published between 2020 and 2025, this study is expected to provide theoretical insights and practical implications for educators and researchers interested in adopting drama as a meaningful and transformative approach to English language teaching.

2. The literature review

2.1 English Language Learning in EFL Contexts

English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning takes place in contexts where English is not used as a primary means of daily communication, resulting in limited exposure to authentic language input and interaction outside the classroom. Consequently, English instruction in EFL settings often relies on formal classroom practices that emphasize grammatical accuracy, vocabulary memorization, and examination-oriented learning (Richards, 2017; Nation, 2013). While such approaches may support linguistic knowledge, they frequently provide insufficient opportunities for meaningful communication.

Scholars argue that the development of communicative competence, particularly speaking and listening skills, requires active language use in contextualized and interactive situations (Canale & Swain, 1980; Brown, 2014). Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) emphasizes learner engagement, authentic interaction, and purposeful language use as essential elements of effective language learning. However, in many EFL classrooms, the implementation of communicative practices remains challenging due to large class sizes, limited instructional time, curriculum constraints, and learners' anxiety when using English orally (Littlewood, 2007). These challenges highlight the need for alternative pedagogical approaches that allow learners to use English actively, creatively, and meaningfully within the classroom environment. One approach that aligns closely with communicative and learner-centered principles is drama-based learning.

2.2 Drama-Based Learning in English Language Education

Drama-based learning refers to the pedagogical use of dramatic techniques, such as role-play, improvisation, simulation, and performance, to support language learning objectives. In language education, drama is conceptualized not as a theatrical product but as a process-oriented learning activity that integrates verbal language, body movement,

emotion, and social interaction (Alasmari & Alshae'el, 2020; Kao & O'Neill, 1998). Educational drama differs from conventional theatre in that it prioritizes the learning process rather than polished performances. Drama activities are typically flexible, open-ended, and adaptable to learners' proficiency levels and instructional goals. Through imagined scenarios and role enactment, learners are encouraged to negotiate meaning, experiment with language, and engage in authentic communication without the pressure of real-life consequences (Maley & Duff, 2005).

Theoretically, drama-based learning is grounded in constructivist, experiential, and sociocultural theories of learning, which view knowledge as actively constructed through experience and social interaction (Vygotsky, 1978). Drama creates communicative contexts that require learners to listen, speak, interpret meaning, and respond appropriately, supporting language development through use rather than passive reception. By engaging with dialogue, character roles, and situational contexts, learners practice language at the discourse level, which contributes to fluency and pragmatic competence (Bygate, 2015).

Beyond linguistic considerations, drama-based learning is also closely associated with affective and social dimensions of language education. Drama activities can reduce learners' anxiety by allowing them to speak through roles rather than as themselves, thereby increasing confidence and willingness to communicate (Kao & O'Neill, 1998). The collaborative nature of drama further supports the development of social skills such as cooperation, empathy, and respect for diverse perspectives, positioning language learning as a social practice rather than an individual cognitive task (Hall, 2012).

3. Method

This study employs a qualitative library research method to explore in depth the role and effectiveness of drama in English language learning. Library research was selected because it enables a systematic and critical examination of theoretical frameworks, pedagogical models, and empirical findings related to drama-based learning across diverse educational contexts (Connaway et al., 2021). This approach is particularly suitable for synthesizing existing knowledge and identifying patterns, contributions, and research gaps within a specific field of study.

3.1 Data Sources and Selection Criteria

The data sources consist of 15 scholarly documents, including peer-reviewed journal articles and conference proceedings published between 2020 and 2025. The selection of this number was based on strict inclusion criteria and thematic saturation, rather than limited availability of studies. During the review process, it was observed that key themes related to drama-based learning, such as language acquisition, student motivation, social skill development, and pedagogical implementation, began to recur consistently across

the selected literature, indicating sufficient saturation for qualitative synthesis. The inclusion criteria for document selection were as follows:

- Publications focusing on drama-based approaches, role-play, process drama, or performance-based learning in English language education.
- Studies conducted in EFL or ESL contexts.
- Peer-reviewed journal articles or conference proceedings.
- Publications released between 2020 and 2025.
- Studies discussing linguistic, social, motivational, or pedagogical outcomes of drama-based learning.

Then, the exclusion criteria included were:

- studies unrelated to language learning (e.g., drama in general education without language focus),
- opinion papers or non-peer-reviewed sources,
- publications published before 2020, and
- studies focusing solely on literary analysis without pedagogical implications.

3.2 Data Collection Procedure

The data collection process began with a systematic search of reputable academic databases and journals. Keywords such as drama in English language learning, role play in EFL classrooms, process drama, and drama-based learning were used to identify relevant sources. An initial screening based on titles and abstracts was conducted to determine relevance. Subsequently, full-text screening was applied to ensure alignment with the inclusion criteria. Following this process, 15 documents were deemed suitable for in-depth qualitative analysis.

3.3 Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using thematic content analysis. The analysis followed three main stages. First, each selected document was read thoroughly to gain a holistic understanding of its focus, methodology, and findings. Second, open coding was applied to identify key concepts and recurring ideas related to the role, benefits, challenges, and pedagogical applications of drama in English language learning. Third, similar codes were grouped and refined into broader themes through axial coding, resulting in several core themes.

To enhance the trustworthiness of the analysis, themes were reviewed and validated by re-examining the original texts to ensure consistency and relevance. The final themes focused on:

- the role of drama in language acquisition,
- its influence on students' motivation and social skills, and

- pedagogical strategies and challenges in implementing drama-based activities in classroom settings.

3.4 Synthesis of Findings

The findings from the analyzed literature indicate that drama provides authentic contexts for language use, enhances cultural awareness, and promotes active learner engagement. Moreover, the reviewed studies consistently report positive student responses toward collaborative and expressive learning experiences facilitated through drama-based activities. Through this systematic library research method, a comprehensive understanding of drama's contribution to English language learning is developed. The results suggest that drama is not merely a tool for linguistic practice but a transformative pedagogical medium that supports communicative, meaningful, and student-centered learning. These findings form the basis for recommending broader implementation of drama-based approaches, particularly at the secondary and higher education levels, to enhance the quality of English language instruction.

4. Results and Discussion of Literature Analysis

This section presents the findings derived from a qualitative library research synthesizing recent academic literature (2020–2025) on the use of drama in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning at the secondary (senior high school) and tertiary (higher education) levels. The discussion focuses on: (1) the concept of drama in EFL learning, (2) its contributions to language acquisition, motivation, and social skills, and (3) the pedagogical benefits and challenges of implementing drama-based instruction in English classrooms.

4.1 Drama as a Pedagogical Tool in EFL Learning

Drama is a form of activity that involves using a written script as a foundation for individuals to convey stories and interpret meaning through both spoken dialogue and non-verbal expressions such as gestures, movement, and performance (Otter et al., 2024). Drama is a literary genre created with the purpose of being performed on stage. Broadly speaking, drama can be defined as a performance or written work that tells a story by portraying characters and events, whether real or imagined, in a structured and often emotional manner. Findings from the reviewed literature indicate that, in EFL contexts at both secondary and tertiary levels, drama is increasingly understood not merely as a literary genre but as a pedagogical strategy that facilitates active language use and learner engagement.

Central to drama are elements such as conflict, character, and dialogue, all of which are presented through live or imagined performance that engages both the performers and the audience. In the field of education, particularly in language learning, the term "drama" takes on a more interactive and pedagogical meaning. It is commonly referred to as role

play, a learning activity where both teachers and students use imagination to explore social situations, real-life issues, or fictional scenarios by acting them out (Ifianti, 2022). Studies conducted in senior high schools and universities show that such activities help learners practice English in meaningful and contextualized situations rather than through isolated language drills.

Unlike traditional theatrical performances, educational drama does not always rely on pre-written scripts or rehearsed lines (Nanda & Susanto, 2021). Instead, it often involves spontaneous interaction, improvisation, and collaborative storytelling. Research findings consistently report that this spontaneity encourages students to negotiate meaning, express ideas freely, and engage more confidently in English communication, especially in speaking-focused EFL classes. These features allow students to actively construct meaning, express ideas, and engage with language in dynamic and creative ways. Drama in the classroom serves as a type of social simulation in which participants explore themes, values, and perspectives by embodying different roles. This imaginative engagement offers learners the opportunity to see the world through the eyes of others and reflect on their own thoughts and behaviours in the process. It enables them to investigate situations and moral dilemmas, represent characters' viewpoints, and experiment with new ways of thinking and communicating (Yusriansyah, 2022). Therefore, drama is not merely a mirror of reality; it is also a tool for interpreting, questioning, and reshaping it.

A unique characteristic of drama as a teaching and learning method is its emphasis on creativity, openness, and participation. Through dramatic activities, learners are encouraged to use both verbal and nonverbal forms of communication, collaborate with peers, and contribute to the creation of meaningful narratives. These activities may include character improvisation, situation simulations, collaborative story-building, or open-ended dramatic exploration all of which serve as valuable opportunities for students to express themselves and practice language in context. One prominent form within educational drama is process drama, which stands apart from traditional scripted performances (Luo et al., 2024). Unlike conventional drama that focuses on rehearsed acting and fixed texts, process drama adopts an open-ended and imaginative pedagogical approach. Findings from tertiary-level studies indicate that process drama creates a low-anxiety environment where students can experiment with language use without fear of making mistakes, while secondary-level studies highlight its role in increasing classroom participation and motivation. It invites learners to take an active role in building an imagined world collaboratively, often without a predefined script. Through this immersive experience, students become creators, decision-makers, and participants in unfolding scenarios that closely resemble real-life situations.

Language learning is not merely the transmission of grammar structures and vocabulary; it is also a process of negotiation and construction of meaning. In this regard, process drama offers a dynamic learning environment where students interact with

language in an authentic, functional, and context-rich manner. By enacting situations that reflect real-life communication, learners are encouraged to express themselves spontaneously, interpret meaning from context, and develop confidence in using the target language beyond the classroom. Thus, drama in education is not merely a form of artistic performance; it is a holistic, student-centered approach that integrates the intellectual, emotional, and social dimensions of learning. Drama creates a safe and imaginative space where students can develop their language skills, enhance critical thinking, and strengthen interpersonal communication. In this sense, drama is not merely about acting; it is about understanding, engaging, and growing through experience.

4.2 Drama Elements and Activities in the EFL Classroom

This subsection discusses the elements and types of drama that are commonly adapted and utilized in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning, particularly at the secondary (senior high school) and tertiary (higher education) levels. Rather than viewing drama solely as a literary product, this study positions dramatic elements as pedagogical resources that support meaningful language use, interaction, and learner engagement. Understanding these elements enables teachers to design drama-based activities that promote students' speaking skills, communicative competence, motivation, and social interaction in classroom settings.

Elements of Drama in the EFL Classroom

Although drama originates from literary traditions, its core elements can be effectively adapted to EFL instruction. Findings from studies conducted in senior high schools and universities indicate that these elements function as scaffolding tools that help learners organize ideas, express meaning, and participate actively in communicative tasks.

a) Plot

In EFL learning, plot refers to the structured sequence of events that frames dramatic activities such as role-play, simulation, and storytelling. A clear plot provides learners with a logical flow of interaction, guiding them to understand when and how to use language appropriately. At the secondary level, simple plots, such as daily-life scenarios or school-related situations, are often used to support basic speaking practice and narrative skills. Meanwhile, at the tertiary level, more complex plots are employed to stimulate extended discussions, critical thinking, and problem-solving through drama-based tasks. By following stages such as exposition, rising action, climax, and resolution, students are encouraged to organize their spoken discourse coherently and meaningfully (Handayani et al., 2022).

b) Characters

A character is an individual who appears in a story, whether it's a short story, novel, drama, or film. A character is portrayed with certain traits that are revealed through their

speech and actions throughout the narrative (Rahmah et al., 2021). Characters in drama-based EFL learning serve as communicative roles that allow students to speak through imagined identities rather than as themselves. This role distance is particularly beneficial in reducing anxiety and increasing confidence among learners. In senior high school contexts, characters are often simple and familiar, enabling students to practice everyday expressions and basic interactions. In higher education settings, characters may represent diverse social roles or professional identities, which helps learners develop pragmatic competence and sociolinguistic awareness.

In addition to this, when analysed based on their role and function within the conflict, characters can be classified into several types, including:

- Protagonist, the main character who, in real life, is often associated with someone possessing good or admirable traits. This character typically becomes the central figure because they represent positive values such as honesty, bravery, and compassion. Protagonists usually earn the sympathy of readers or audiences, as their struggles against challenges reflect meaningful and relatable human experiences (Widiatmika, 2023).
- Antagonist, the character who opposes the protagonist. They are often the source of conflict in the story because they stand in opposition to the goals or values upheld by the protagonist.
- Tritagonist, a supporting character who stands between the protagonist and antagonist. This character might take sides, mediate, or even shift positions depending on the situation, making their role a balancing or complementary force in the central conflict.

c) Setting

Setting in drama refers to the elements of place, time, and atmosphere in which the events take place. It not only provides a backdrop for the location and time of the story but also creates the context that influences the plot and the characters' behaviour. The place can be a real location, such as a house, school, or forest, or an imaginary one. Time may refer to specific periods such as morning, the rainy season, the 19th century, or the future. The atmosphere (or mood) reflects the emotional tone of the scene, such as tension, sadness, or joy. In its full meaning, setting includes the relationship between the events and the surrounding conditions that affect them. Although often confused, the setting in drama is not the same as the stage. The stage is the physical representation of the setting, which is visualized through stage design, lighting, sound, and props during a performance (Melani et al., 2024)

In classroom practice, settings such as schools, workplaces, public spaces, or fictional environments provide realistic contexts for language use. Studies at both secondary and tertiary levels reveal that contextualized settings help learners understand situational language, adjust register, and use appropriate expressions. Setting thus

functions as a contextual cue that enhances comprehension and supports meaningful interaction rather than merely serving as a physical stage.

d) Dialogue

Dialogue in drama refers to the text containing conversations between characters, whether in the form of dialogue between two or more characters or monologues delivered by a single character. Through these spoken exchanges, the personalities, motivations, and relationships of the characters are revealed. The drama script, consisting primarily of dialogue, serves as the main guide for stage performances. Since drama lacks a narrator as found in novels, dialogue becomes the primary tool for conveying the storyline, developing characters, and building conflict. Effective dialogue not only sounds natural but also carries meaning, emotion, and essential information that drives the plot forward.

Through character conversations, the audience gains insight into their feelings, thoughts, and interpersonal dynamics. Beyond storytelling, dialogue helps establish the rhythm and atmosphere of a scene. In performance, lines must be delivered with appropriate intonation, facial expressions, and body movements to ensure the story's message is fully conveyed to the audience (Rizky et al., 2024).

Dialogue is the core component of drama-based instruction in EFL classrooms. It provides learners with opportunities to practice spoken interaction, pronunciation, intonation, and conversational strategies. At the secondary level, dialogues are often short and guided, focusing on functional language such as greetings, requests, and responses. At the tertiary level, dialogue becomes more spontaneous and extended, involving negotiation of meaning, argumentation, and reflective discussion. Research findings consistently indicate that drama-based dialogue enhances learners' fluency and confidence, as students are actively engaged in purposeful communication rather than memorization.

e) Theme

The theme is the central idea or main message that underlies the story, serving as the foundation and purpose the writer wishes to convey through the chosen topic. The theme is the core message that the playwright intends to communicate to the audience (Lusiana, 2022). Themes can be universal, such as love, betrayal, justice, power, friendship, or the struggle against fate. The theme forms the basis for plot and conflict development and adds deeper meaning to the story.

In EFL learning, themes serve as central ideas that guide drama activities and classroom discussions. Themes such as friendship, conflict, identity, or social issues provide meaningful content that encourages learners to express opinions, share experiences, and engage emotionally with the learning process. At the secondary level, themes are usually familiar and relatable, while tertiary-level studies often employ more abstract or critical themes to promote higher-order thinking and extended language use.

Themes thus function as cognitive and emotional anchors that enrich communicative practice.

f) Conflict

Conflict is a crucial element in drama, as without it, the story would lack dynamics and development. Conflict refers to a clash of interests, whether it occurs between characters or within a single character. In the context of dramatic literature, conflict often stems from social issues in the writer's own society, which the author then transforms into a meaningful part of the narrative (Jabbar & Saleh, 2025.). Generally, conflict is divided into two main types. The first is internal conflict, which refers to struggles within a character's mind, such as doubt, fear, or moral dilemmas. The second is external conflict, which arises between the character and outside forces such as other people, societal norms, nature, or even supernatural elements. These conflicts drive the plot forward, push characters to grow or change, and build emotional tension that engages the audience. How the conflict is resolved or left unresolved ultimately shapes the direction and conclusion of the story.

Research in both senior high school and university contexts shows that conflict-driven scenarios increase student participation and promote meaningful discussion. By resolving conflicts through dialogue, learners practice persuasive language, problem-solving skills, and collaborative communication.

g) Stage Directions

Stage directions in educational drama are adapted as instructional cues rather than rigid theatrical instructions. In EFL classrooms, they guide students' gestures, movements, and expressions, supporting the integration of verbal and non-verbal communication. These cues help learners convey meaning more effectively and develop awareness of body language, which is an important component of communicative competence. Studies indicate that such embodied practices are particularly effective in reducing anxiety and increasing engagement across both secondary and tertiary levels.

Types of Drama in the EFL Classroom

In EFL classrooms, especially at the senior high school and university levels, drama is implemented not in its pure literary forms but through adapted activity types that support language learning objectives.

a) Role-play and Simulation

Role-play and simulation are the most widely used drama activities in EFL classrooms, particularly at the secondary (senior high school) level. In these activities, students are assigned specific roles and asked to act out situations that reflect real-life communication, such as conversations in schools, restaurants, public services, or social interactions. This

type of activity allows learners to practice functional language and everyday expressions in a low-pressure environment.

Research findings suggest that role-play helps students improve speaking fluency, expand vocabulary, and increase confidence, as learners communicate through fictional roles rather than as themselves. At the tertiary level, simulations are often designed to be more complex and academically oriented, including scenarios such as job interviews, professional meetings, academic discussions, or problem-solving tasks. As a result, role-play and simulation contribute not only to linguistic development but also to pragmatic competence and real-world communicative readiness.

b) Process Drama

Process drama is more commonly implemented in higher education contexts, although several studies have also reported its use at the secondary level. Unlike traditional drama that focuses on scripted performances and final products, process drama emphasizes the learning process, improvisation, and collaborative meaning-making. Learners actively construct the narrative, characters, and conflicts without relying on a fixed script. In EFL learning, process drama creates a low-anxiety environment that encourages spontaneous language use and extended interaction. Students are required to negotiate meaning, express opinions, and respond to evolving situations using the target language. Studies at the tertiary level indicate that process drama is effective in enhancing speaking fluency, critical thinking, collaboration, and learner autonomy. At the secondary level, it has been shown to increase classroom participation and motivation, particularly among students who are usually reluctant to speak.

c) Comedy-Based Drama Activities

Comedy-based drama activities incorporate humor, light-hearted scenarios, and amusing dialogue to create an enjoyable learning atmosphere. These activities are applied in both senior high school and university EFL classrooms and are particularly effective in reducing learners' anxiety and fear of making mistakes. Humor encourages students to take risks in speaking and promotes spontaneous language production. In secondary education, comedy-based activities are often used to practice daily conversational expressions and improve students' confidence. In tertiary education, comedic drama may take the form of satire or social commentary, allowing students to express ideas creatively while engaging in critical reflection. Overall, comedy-based drama activities enhance learner motivation, engagement, and oral communication skills.

d) Musical and Multimodal Drama Activities

Musical drama and multimodal activities integrate dialogue with music, songs, movement, and visual expression. These activities are frequently used at the secondary level, especially to support pronunciation, intonation, and listening skills. Songs and rhythmic movement help learners memorize vocabulary and language patterns more

effectively while creating a positive emotional learning experience. At the tertiary level, musical and multimodal drama activities are adapted into more reflective and creative tasks, such as spoken-word performances, musical storytelling, or performance-based speaking projects. These activities accommodate diverse learning styles and promote the integration of verbal and non-verbal communication. Findings from the reviewed literature indicate that multimodal drama activities enhance learners' emotional engagement and contribute to the development of holistic communicative competence.

4.3 Advantages of Using Drama in the EFL Classroom

By focusing on secondary and tertiary EFL contexts, the findings of this study indicate that drama-based activities contribute significantly to language acquisition, learner motivation, and social skill development. The advantages identified from the reviewed literature are discussed as follows.

Enhancing Speaking Skills

Drama provides learners with meaningful opportunities to use English in communicative and contextualized situations. By performing roles and interacting through dialogue, students are required to produce language actively rather than passively receiving input. This process supports language acquisition by encouraging repeated exposure to vocabulary, sentence patterns, and discourse structures in authentic contexts. In both secondary and tertiary classrooms, drama activities promote speaking fluency, vocabulary development, and syntactic accuracy through continuous practice during rehearsals and performances. Unlike mechanical drills, drama-based interaction emphasizes meaning-making, which aligns with communicative language teaching principles.

Improving Pronunciation and Prosodic Features

Drama also plays an important role in developing learners' pronunciation, stress, rhythm, and intonation. When students perform a role, they must convey meaning and emotion clearly, which requires appropriate vocal expression. This encourages learners to focus on how English sounds in real communication rather than isolated pronunciation exercises. In senior high school settings, drama helps learners gain awareness of basic pronunciation patterns, while in higher education, it supports more refined prosodic control suitable for academic and professional communication.

Increasing Learner Motivation and Confidence

One of the most frequently reported benefits of drama is its positive impact on learner motivation. Drama creates a supportive and enjoyable learning environment where students are encouraged to participate actively. Speaking as a character reduces anxiety and fear of making mistakes, especially for learners who are shy or lack confidence. Across both educational levels, repeated engagement in drama activities gradually builds

self-confidence and willingness to communicate in English, which is essential for sustained language development.

Fostering Creativity and Critical Thinking

Drama encourages learners to use imagination, create dialogues, interpret roles, and respond to evolving situations. This creative engagement supports higher-order thinking skills such as analysis, interpretation, and problem-solving. In tertiary EFL contexts, drama-based tasks often involve more complex themes and social issues, allowing students to critically reflect on content while using English as a medium of expression. This demonstrates drama's pedagogical contribution beyond linguistic outcomes.

Developing Social Skills and Collaboration

Drama is inherently collaborative. Students must work together to plan scenes, negotiate meaning, and support one another during performances. Through this process, learners develop important social skills such as cooperation, empathy, respect for diverse perspectives, and effective communication. These social competencies are particularly relevant to the study's second objective, as drama-based learning strengthens interpersonal interaction in both classroom and real-life contexts.

Promoting Cultural Awareness

Drama exposes learners to cultural values, social norms, and communication styles embedded in English-language texts. By performing roles from different cultural backgrounds, students gain deeper intercultural understanding and sensitivity. This cultural exposure supports communicative competence and prepares learners to engage in global communication, which is especially important in tertiary education.

Creating an Engaging Learning Environment

Drama transforms the classroom into a vibrant, interactive, and enjoyable learning space. Through drama, students can move, speak, express emotions, and even laugh, all while learning. Activities that involve the body and emotions directly have been proven to increase engagement and memory retention. Students become emotionally and cognitively involved, which enhances their motivation to learn. This is especially beneficial for kinaesthetic and visual learners who thrive through active learning.

4.4 Methods of Teaching English Using Drama

The reviewed studies identify several drama-based methods that contribute pedagogically to EFL instruction at secondary and tertiary levels. These methods support language acquisition while also presenting practical challenges for classroom implementation.

Role-Playing

Role-playing is one of the most effective methods in English language learning because it allows students to use the language in realistic and communicative contexts. Role play

can serve as a quick method for identifying, understanding, and categorizing various behaviours and appearances. It is intended to reflect group norms and the social skills necessary for interacting with individuals or groups (Henisah et al., 2023). This method supports language acquisition by integrating speaking, listening, and pragmatic competence. Additionally, role-playing enhances motivation and social interaction by encouraging empathy and perspective-taking. However, successful implementation requires clear role explanation and teacher guidance, particularly for lower-level learners (Saldanha, 2024).

Mime and Movement

Mime is a form of drama that uses physical movement and facial expressions without speech. In the context of language teaching, mime is extremely useful as it helps students convey and interpret meaning through body language. Mime emphasizes non-verbal communication through gestures, facial expressions, and body movement. In EFL contexts, this method supports vocabulary retention and comprehension, especially for beginner and secondary-level learners. Mime reduces speaking anxiety and gradually builds confidence, contributing indirectly to motivation and classroom participation. It also highlights the importance of non-verbal cues in communication.

Improvisation

Improvisation, which entails creating dialogue and action spontaneously without relying on a predetermined script, serves as a powerful tool in language learning, particularly for enhancing speaking skills and promoting real-time, creative language use. When engaged in improvisation activities, learners are typically presented with scenarios or roles, such as explaining to a teacher why they are late or deciding what to do after finding a wallet, and are required to respond on the spot. These tasks compel students to draw upon their existing linguistic knowledge and apply it in inventive ways to convey meaning effectively. As a result, improvisation not only boosts learners' confidence and fluency but also trains them to be more adaptable and comfortable speaking in front of others. Beyond individual benefits, improvisation also aligns with broader pedagogical principles in tertiary education. According to Berk and Trieber (2009), improvisation addresses modern learners' expectations for active, collaborative, and student-centred learning environments. It stimulates multiple forms of intelligence: verbal, visual, kinaesthetic, interpersonal, and intrapersonal, enhancing both cognitive and emotional engagement. Moreover, the collaborative nature of improvisational tasks fosters essential interpersonal skills such as trust, respect, listening, and effective communication, while encouraging risk-taking through spontaneous storytelling and role-playing. These dynamic, interactive elements not only make learning more engaging but also cultivate deep learning by immersing students in meaningful, real-life communication experiences (Zondag, 2024).

Scripted Drama

Scripted drama involves the use of pre-written scripts that students read or perform. This method provides a clear structure for students, especially those who may feel less confident using language spontaneously. By reading and performing from a script, students can focus on pronunciation, intonation, and fluency. Teachers may choose simple texts or adapt well-known stories to suit the learners' language level. Scripted drama is also a great tool for vocabulary building and reinforcing grammatical structures in context. Beyond language practice, students are exposed to literary and cultural aspects of drama, such as theme, character, and conflict. They learn how to express emotions and nuance through expressive reading and performance, enriching their appreciation of storytelling.

Simulation

Simulation is similar to role-play but more complex and closer to real-life scenarios. In simulation, students not only act out a role but must also understand the character deeply, including motivations, background, and purpose. Scenarios may include job interviews, political debates, business negotiations, or panel discussions. This method challenges students to think critically, organize ideas, and express opinions logically and persuasively in English. It is especially effective for intermediate to advanced learners, as it demands a more sophisticated use of language and reasoning.

4.5 Challenges in Implementing Drama-Based Instruction

Although drama-based instruction offers significant linguistic, motivational, and social benefits, the literature also highlights several challenges that hinder its effective implementation in EFL classrooms at both secondary and tertiary levels. These challenges relate to institutional, pedagogical, and learner-related factors.

Limited Instructional Time

One of the most frequently reported challenges is limited classroom time. Drama activities often require extended periods for preparation, rehearsal, and reflection, which can be difficult to accommodate within rigid school schedules. In secondary education, English lessons are typically time-bound and examination-oriented, leaving little space for creative and performance-based activities. Similarly, in tertiary contexts, tight syllabi and credit-hour limitations often restrict the consistent integration of drama-based instruction.

Large Class Sizes

Large class sizes present another major obstacle to implementing drama effectively. Managing performances, monitoring participation, and providing feedback become increasingly difficult when student numbers are high. In senior high schools, overcrowded classrooms limit students' opportunities to actively participate, while in

universities, large lecture-style classes reduce the feasibility of interactive drama activities. As a result, drama may be reduced to occasional tasks rather than a sustained pedagogical approach.

Teachers' Limited Training and Confidence in Drama Pedagogy

Another critical challenge lies in teachers' professional preparedness. Many EFL teachers have limited training in drama-based instruction and may lack confidence in designing, facilitating, and assessing drama activities. Without adequate pedagogical knowledge, drama may be treated as an entertainment activity rather than a structured learning tool. This issue is evident across both secondary and higher education contexts, highlighting the need for professional development programs that integrate drama pedagogy into teacher education.

Students' Anxiety and Reluctance to Perform

Learners' affective factors also influence the success of drama activities. Some students initially experience anxiety, embarrassment, or fear of making mistakes when asked to perform in front of others. This reluctance is particularly evident among lower-proficiency learners and adolescents in secondary schools. Even in tertiary settings, students with limited speaking confidence may resist active participation. Without proper scaffolding and a supportive classroom atmosphere, drama activities may fail to engage all learners equally.

5. Conclusion

This qualitative library research synthesizes scholarly literature published between 2020 and 2025 on the use of drama-based approaches in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning, with a focus on secondary (senior high school) and tertiary (higher education) contexts. The study examines the role of drama in language acquisition, its impact on learners' motivation and social skill development, and the pedagogical contributions and challenges of drama-based instruction. The findings indicate that drama plays a significant role in supporting language acquisition, particularly in speaking and listening skills, by providing authentic, contextualized, and meaningful opportunities for communicative language use. Through activities such as role-play, improvisation, and performance-based tasks, learners engage in repeated and purposeful language practice that enhances fluency and communicative competence across both educational levels.

The reviewed studies also reveal that drama-based learning positively influences learners' motivation, confidence, and social skills by creating collaborative and low-anxiety learning environments. Drama encourages empathy, creativity, and interpersonal interaction, which are especially valuable in EFL contexts with limited exposure to authentic communication. Pedagogically, drama-based instruction supports student-centered and active learning; however, its implementation faces challenges, including

limited instructional time, large class sizes, insufficient teacher training, and learners' reluctance to perform. These constraints highlight the need for institutional support, professional development, and curriculum flexibility. Despite limitations related to reliance on secondary data and a limited number of reviewed studies, this synthesis confirms that drama-based learning is a meaningful pedagogical approach that enhances both linguistic and affective dimensions of EFL learning and holds strong potential for secondary and tertiary education.

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