EXPLORING STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVES ON THE USE OF DRAMA TECHNIQUES IN EFL SPEAKING LESSONS

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ABSTRACT

Teaching English speaking skills in schools can be a challenge, but it is rewarding. English is commonly the most spoken language in the world, and having a good command of the language can open a world of opportunities in the future. English speaking skills also facilitate purposeful communication with people from various linguistic backgrounds. Drama techniques offer an alternative method for instructing speaking skills, allowing participants to step into the characters' shoes. These roles also give them several chances to communicate ideas, feelings, opinions, etc. In this study, two drama techniques have been implemented in accordance with the presented units in the EFL Palestinian curriculum of grade six. The study continued for nine weeks. This study explored the primary students' opinions about drama techniques that have been used in instructing EFL speaking lessons. The data is collected with semi-structured interviews after the intervention period has been completed. Thematic analysis has been used to analyse the gathered data. To conclude, participants have experienced different positive feelings. They also prefer the frequent use of drama techniques. Communication and social skills have been improved because of drama implementation. Finally, they admit that drama techniques offer clear instructions leading to positive learning development.

Keywords: *Drama Techniques, EFL Speaking Skills, Qualitative Research, Semi-Structured Interview*

INTRODUCTION

Educating English speaking can be difficult, but it is a fundamental part of language learning (Hushayish et al., 2018). To help students refine their speaking abilities, instructors must give them chances to converse and communicate in English. This can be done through various tasks such as role-playing, debates, conversations, and presentations, which help students enhance their speaking skills and increase their certainty in utilising the language. Additionally, offering students a supportive and non-judgmental atmosphere can stimulate them to take risks and participate energetically in speaking activities.

Due to the international failure of traditional teaching methods in teaching English as a foreign language, especially speaking skills, have often been ignored inside the classroom, notwithstanding their

significance   (Ahmed, 2019; Galante & Thomson, 2017; Joma et al., 2016). By the same token, Al-Muhtaseb (2015) assured that Palestine's learning and teaching system still ignores speaking skills and does not provide enough opportunities for learners to express themselves. Overall, both schools and universities in Palestine still lack the correct pedagogy to teach the English language.

Because of the increasing demand for speaking the English language for academic, social, technological and industrial purposes in the 21st **century, new various techniques' efficiency has been experienced.** With the emergence of new searches on teaching foreign languages for communication, the answer is techniques that empower students over teachers, allow them to become more responsible for learning and shape it. Of course, drama has taken place in this area and has become one of the most important topics in the last ten years. Drama techniques help reduce the gap between real-life situations, allowing students to deal with tricky situations. Through drama activities, situations are designed for learners to communicate naturally as the classroom doors open to the outside world.

Drama in education is not restricted to introducing students to new information. On the contrary, it enhances their ability to use what they have learned. With this merit, drama techniques are functional and suitable for speaking classes since they offer learners opportunities to learn and use the language for actual purposes (Altun, 2019). Taylor (2016) pointed out that drama helps learners express themselves in the learning process by simultaneously playing audience and actors' roles. During playing roles, they will communicate without fear of making mistakes because they play new characters and they will also learn through their choices and preferences.

A closer look at the literature on drama techniques and speaking skills has revealed a positive influence. Kumar et al. (2022) investigated the impact of a drama technique on the speaking skills of English undergraduate learners and self-confidence. The outcomes concluded that teaching English as a foreign language through drama techniques significantly impacts the acquisition of fluent speaking abilities and results in positive improvements in the target audience's communication skills. Likewise, Aladini and Jalambo (2021) and Marfuah and Patmasari (2020) in Palestine and Turkey, respectively, found that drama techniques revealed significant advancement in speaking fluency, accuracy, and comprehensibility. They added that pupils could speak English more fluently, correctly, and confidently since they are closely linked to the learners' lives and allow them to interact successfully with various scenarios.

Simultaneously, the search started investigating the effectiveness of creative drama/educational drama on various linguistic skills and areas worldwide, there is a paucity **of exploring the participants'** perspectives about implementing drama techniques to teach them speaking skills. This study fills the gap in the literature by addressing participants' feedback as a valuable and unexplored dimension, offering insights that can inform pedagogical practices in language teaching. As a result, this study fills this gap and addresses the following question:

What are the Palestinian EFL **participants'** perspectives about implementing drama techniques in teaching speaking lessons?

METHODOLOGY

Research Design
A study design is intended to provide a framework for data collecting and analysis processes (Sileyew, 2019). The choice of a research design depends on the nature of the research topic or issue being addressed, the personal experiences of the researchers, and the study's intended audience (Creswell, 2009). Thus, the present study adopts a comprehensive qualitative approach to analyse the perspectives of sixth-grade students in the city of Qalqilia regarding using drama techniques to learn speaking abilities. This is done by using one-to-one interviews.

Instrument

According to Creswell and Poth (2016), semi-structured/in-depth interviews require a minimal sample size of 5 to 25 individuals. Semi-structured individual interviews (Creswell, 2012) were adopted from Gürbüz's (2021) work better to understand the EFL Palestinian sixth graders' perspectives. There were four questions. To gather data, the researcher adopted one semi-structured "interview protocol" (Creswell, 2012). This protocol worked as a directory to ensure that the intended area was covered.

Sample

The six participants (3 females and 3 males) were selected randomly after having been taught by drama techniques for nine weeks in the academic year 2021\2022. In this context, consent forms were sent to parents of those taught by drama introducing the study's aim and ensuring the participants' privacy would be protected. It also showed that participants might be asked for their perspectives, and their speech would be recorded for scientific use. In addition, each participant was assigned a pseudonym to ensure their anonymity. As stated on the parental consent forms, all records would be stored securely for five years.
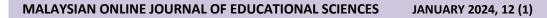
Procedures

The Six selected interviewees were met individually and interviewed using semi-structured interview protocols. The interviews took place in a calm setting, such as the teachers' room, the library, or an empty classroom. The researcher chose these places because it was quiet, private, and familiar to the interviewees. According to Jacob and Furgerson (2012) and Herzog (2012), the interview location should be where the participant feels at ease, as this is essential to a fruitful interview. It also should be convenient for the participant where participants are familiar with it, if possible.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis is used to analyse the data. Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke created this method initially for psychological study. At this stage, an inductive thematic analysis is used where the available data allows to construction of themes. There are several ways to carry out thematic analysis; however, the most popular method involves these six steps: 1) familiarising with data, 2) generating initial codes, 3) searching for themes, 4) reviewing the themes, 5) defining and naming themes, and 6) producing the report (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Table 1
Phases of Thematic Analysis

Phase	Description the Process
1. Familiarising with data	Data transcription, data reading and rereading, noting down initial ideas.
2. Generating initial codes	systematically coding important data characteristics across the whole data collection, and collecting data related to each code.
3. Searching for themes	Organising codes into prospective themes and collecting all essential data for each potential theme.
4. Reviewing themes	producing a thematic map of the analysis by testing if the themes operate in connection to the coded extracts (level1) and the whole data set (level2).
5. Defining and naming themes	continuous study to revise the specifics of each theme as well as the overall storey told by the analysis, resulting in unambiguous definitions and titles for each theme.

| 6.Producing the report | This is the last chance for analysis. Selection of vivid, complete extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, linking back to the research question and literature, and writing a scholarly report of the analysis. |

Note. Adopted from Braun and Clarke's (2006).

FINDINGS

This section presents the qualitative findings from this study of EFL Palestinian sixth graders' perspectives about the creative drama techniques implemented in their EFL classrooms in the Qalqilia city. Participants were asked four questions in the semi-structured interview protocol. The questions are the following:

1. Were your activities fun? If yes, how did you find it fun? If not, what is the reason?
2. **What was your favourite event? Was there any activity you didn't like? Which aspects do you** like/dislike?
3. Would you like to be taught again with this method?
4. Was there a point you did not understand about the lesson while the activities were taking place?

The following three themes are the primary findings about integrated drama techniques.

Positive Feelings
The first theme was positive feelings. The data showed that students had several positive feelings during engagement in drama techniques and expressed their positive emotions. All respondents revealed they felt fun, cheerful, excited, interested, and motivated during the drama techniques implementation. For one, this referred to freedom from any restrictions they used to have in the traditional EFL-speaking classrooms since she became another person. This was clear in the third female student's response (SF3) as follows:

Yes, I felt fun and joy. I eagerly waited for classes to join drama. When I moved to the imaginary world, I felt free and that I was another person with a task to accomplish and succeed. (SF3)

In this case, the SF3 anticipated the speaking classes impatiently to attend the dramatic activities. She also connected its freedom status with the imaginary world as she pretended to be another human whom others would not judge. When that happened, she felt safe because they did not criticise her. As a result, she wore **others'** shoes and completed her speaking task successfully. Therefore, there was nothing personal to cause her concern. From her words, it was noticeable that she considered herself a successful person who could complete her speaking task perfectly without fear of making any mistakes whenever she communicated using the English language in the EFL speaking lessons.

Another student also indicated positive feelings towards the use of the drama techniques in speaking lessons where he expressed:

Yes, we learned in a fun way. No, I like all the activities. I loved the feeling of enthusiasm and challenge that accompanied us in the imaginary world during the gathering of information and its transmission to the team. I was cheerful and confident. (SM2)

The SM2 excerpt above showed that he was cheerful and confident. These feelings resulted from the enthusiasm and defiance he experienced in the imaginary world, especially when he searched for data and navigated it to others. It seemed that the learner preferred being responsible for exploring and sharing data. The ability to search, bring and transfer relevant data enriched his self-trust and created a more confident student who believed in himself to handle his learning process.

SF5 described her positive feelings toward the selected drama techniques since she was excited and thrilled, as she said below,

Yes, I was cheerful and excited. I felt fun every time I entered the imaginary world. I was motivated by teamwork and constant conversation. (SF5)

This learner liked the drama techniques because they allowed her to cooperate with others as a team and encouraged her to engage in constant conversations. It seemed that this girl preferred collaboration over individuality. It is clear that drama techniques offered her a more significant chance to speak than traditional practices. She also seemed to like participating in continual dialogues.
Similarly, SF6 believed learning English speaking lessons through drama techniques was fun, and she liked it. SF6 response follows,

Yes, the activities we learned were fun. Working with others encouraged and motivated me along. (SF6)

Like SF5, she also seemed to be a collaborative person who enjoys working with others. This type of collaboration encouraged and motivated her to digest data with fun. Collaboration is the main reason she felt fun.

SM1 also declared that his excitement in the imaginary world was why speaking in English classrooms became more fun. This appeared in the following excerpt.

Yes, it was fun. I got excited every time we moved on to the imaginary world. I've never been bored. (SM1)

According to him, drama cancelled the boredom he had experienced compared to traditional techniques. This was because of his excitement when he became a nutritionist in the imaginary world. It seemed that he preferred being another person in a fictional world.

Lastly, SM3 expressed his positive feelings toward learning through drama. The excerpt is shown below:

Yes, it was fun and interesting. I felt fun communicating with the rest of the students, so I felt motivated to play roles and coordinate with my colleagues. I also felt joy because every time I was a new character. (SM3)

SM3 liked drama techniques because they offered him opportunities to communicate with other students. In addition, he became motivated since they provided him with various roles to play with his classmates. This role diversity created a joyful atmosphere where he becomes a new character in every conversation. This learner seemed to prefer being a new person every time he attended a speaking lesson to stay motivated.   He also appeared to be a cooperative individual who enjoyed communicating with the rest of the students.

In a nutshell, learners who experienced the drama techniques for nine weeks in speaking lessons expressed several positive feelings toward these learning techniques. To illustrate, these feelings resulted from several reasons like freedom in the imaginary world, collaboration, teamwork, constant conversations, and data gathering and navigation.

In question number 3, the interviewer asked interviewees if they would like to be taught again with these techniques. The six interviewees expressed their desire to learn using these techniques again. They agreed on their wish to be experts again in different topics and play several roles reflecting on conversations from real-life situations' daily language. Furthermore, some declared their desire to use the imaginary world in their EFL classes. One of the interviewees showed her wish to learn via the implemented creative drama techniques throughout the year. The following are the interviewees' excerpts.

I wish I could learn through drama, be an expert, and play different roles every time. (SM1)
Yes. I hope to learn in drama and live different roles in the imagined world and real-life situations. (SM2)
Yes, I would love to learn this way again. And I like to play more diverse roles. (SM3)
Of course, I like to study through drama, be an expert, and play several roles, such as doctor and astronaut. (SF4)
I want to study through drama. (SF5)
I want to learn through drama throughout the year. (SF6)

It is noticeable that all learners generally prefer drama; even those who mentioned the names declared the two techniques together. All learners approved of drama techniques.

Communication and Social Skills Improvement
For some, it is noticeable that students' roles encouraged communication and social relationships. It also allowed students to know each other better and work with different faces each time. In this regard, drama techniques enabled students to communicate in their EFL class which was prohibited in the past when they were taught through traditional techniques and methods. For example, SF5 said,

I loved role-playing in conversations. I was a different person who had a conversation with a different student. I also loved when we drew, designed, and worked in teams to achieve the goal. (SF5)

In addition, SF4 highlighted that the conversations she used to practice affected her speaking anxiety and fluency. As she said,

………….. Also, the continuous training in conversations encouraged me and broke the fear of error. (SF4)

In addition, SM2 declared that communicating through various daily conversations with classmates increased the social skills of the learner and satisfied his needs, especially if the student is introverted and lacks the communication skills to engage with his classmates. SM2 said that,

…….. I also liked working with a new partner every time we had a conversation, bringing me closer to new students. (SM2)

According to him, communicating with new classmates reduced the social gap among the class members and allowed them to make new friends. In the same vein, conversations increased their communication skills. In conclusion, four interviewees out of six agreed that the integrated creative drama techniques improved communication and social skills among the learners.

Positive Learning Development from Clear Instructions
The clarity of the instructions in the various procedures of using drama techniques in the EFL classroom led to positive learning development. In the fourth question, students were asked about any ambiguous point that might be difficult to comprehend regarding the implementation procedures.

According to the six participants, there were no mysterious or unclear points during the engagement in the drama techniques in the EFL speaking lessons. The following are the excerpts of the interviewees.

No, I understood everything; the instructions were clear before each activity. (SM1)
No ambiguity, everything is understandable. (SM2)
No, the teacher's instructions were sequential, clear, and precisely defined. (SM3)
There was no mystery. (SF4)
Everything was clear. (SF5)
Everything was easy and flexible. (SF6)

Notably, the participants did not face any ambiguity during the participation procedures. This might happen because they were motivated and fully engaged in the various activities. As a result, their senses

were complete with their teacher. The second possible reason was the clarity of the steps in the lesson plans designed by the first researcher who attended a drama diploma degree for two years under AL-Qattan foundation, which was held yearly in Jerash, Jordan. The third was the commitment of voluntary teachers who implemented the creative drama techniques as they followed the steps clarified in the daily lessons on speaking skills. They might also give clear instructions before each activity.

According to Macy (2016), a Vygotskian theory, which holds that collaboration in practice is the basis for learning, includes overt instructions. This overt instruction concept is a significant similarity between Vygotsky and drama that can influence how instructors conduct their work and create particular learning activities. Moreover, they might scaffold students when they face any challenge and ease their mission.

Finally, the content of healthy and non-healthy food was from their settings and its correlation with other academic subjects like science. The selection of correlated content with other subjects facilitates **students' data collection process because they** can gain knowledge from many resources. And the input would enhance the output for both school subjects. As a result, students improved their achievements in the correlated school subjects at the same time.

DISCUSSION

This section discusses participants' perspectives on the integrated creative drama techniques in their EFL speaking classrooms to learn speaking skills. The data interpretations revealed that interviewees who learnt through drama techniques expressed positive perspectives about implementing drama techniques to learn speaking lessons. The data suggests that drama techniques are an exciting tool that releases the boredom they used to experience with the old-fashioned techniques and replaces it with joy, cheerfulness, success, freedom, etc. More clearly, students believe drama techniques are suitable for providing participants with everyday communicative situations. These techniques also let students make new friends with new classmates and enhance the social relationships in the class.

Interviewees showed positive feelings they experienced during the intervention time, and they demonstrated various worthwhile emotions. They ultimately declared they liked these techniques and showed their wishes to learn through them throughout the school year. The employment of drama techniques in teaching the English language to sixth graders was delightful.

Consistent with Fong et al. (2018), theme 1, the drama techniques lower the negative feelings of learners and enhance the positive emotions they experience during the learning process. This creates more active learners in the EFL-speaking classrooms than when they have learned without using these techniques, and they liked how the drama techniques inspired them to attend and participate. Overall, these findings follow the results reported by Gürbüz (2021). She also found that children have no dislike feelings toward drama implementation in the educational classrooms. This resulted from the fact that drama techniques satisfy the psychological demands of social communication, relatedness, independence, and acceptance and have a favourable effect on the oral competencies of learners. Another reason is that certain team-building drama activities can increase students' sense of connectedness and belonging. This feeling is an innate yearning of human nature where people's urge to identify and connect with others is deep-seated.

Drama techniques match some EFL acquisition theories, like Krashen's theory concept of affective filter. These positive students' responses and desire to learn through drama mirror the warm, friendly, and non-threatening atmosphere that allows sixth graders to enjoy what they are doing. It is also a notification that relaxed students could produce and participate in more accurate and fluent conversations with their classmates since they recognise their mistakes are tolerated and part of their improvement. Drama techniques support the social and emotional skills of the learners as they collaborate, listen, and talk together, which enhances speaking skills development.

Students again revealed their wishes to learn through drama techniques. Unlike conventional classrooms, drama techniques place the learners at the centre of the learning process and transform

them into responsible, active learners. Since authority and control shift between student-student, student-teacher, and role-role interactions, power is exquisitely divided among class members, and their function goes beyond recipients to producers. For example, students shed their constrained and bound social positions and discover new faces of their personalities. They also put themselves in other people's shoes to feel safe and free.

Consistent with **Maglaya's (2020)**, in theme 2, the drama inquiry activities provide learners with various conversation opportunities. These chances are real situations where students practice what they know in new social situations. These techniques rely on a community of learners who work as an ensemble. In this study, sixth graders had pairs and multiple conversations. Thus, learners had better social and communicative skills. They also played nutritionist roles who had the responsibility of public awareness and had success doing it.

In addition, as mentioned by the interviewees, they were motivated to join the speaking lessons during **the intervention time, like SF6 "**_Working with others encouraged and motivated me along_**."** On the contrary, Gürbüz's findings (2021) **revealed that some students' motivation could not achieve the target** level because the drama activities in her study were more personalised. This was a drawback to the use of drama in online learning that was not applicable in the current study since the drama activities were collaborative, not individualised.

This outcome may be attributed to the nature of drama activities where learners are socially and **emotionally safe to express whatever they want easily. The drama activities also may boost learners'** passion for learning and speaking English. Moreover, they push them to collaborate, attend class activities, participate actively, and explore new data. As a result, their outcomes are improved regarding their speaking skills.

Regarding the third theme, the pupils claimed they had no trouble following the instructions and understood what had been explained using these techniques. These findings were similar to Gürbüz's study (2021), where participants faced no challenges in understanding the instruction related to the implemented dramatic activities. Giving pupils clear instructions can help ensure they fully understand what they must do to succeed in their classroom. It calms their fears, alleviates their uncertainties, and assists them in being content and successful in school.

There are several reasons why learners understand the instructions in the drama activities. One possible cause is the explicit instructions given by the teachers before, during, and after the drama activities, as stated by interviewees. Finally, voluntary teachers may have optimistic perceptions of drama, Gray et al. (2018) stated that more teachers are conscious of their subjectivities and beliefs. The more their own experiences affect how they interact with students in the drama classroom.

CONCLUSION

Briefly stated, the researcher explored Palestinian EFL sixth graders' perspectives on drama techniques that were implemented in their English-speaking classrooms. In a nutshell, participants expressed several positive feelings (i.e., joy, and happiness) they experienced during learning via dram techniques. In addition, they expressed drama techniques**' ability** to assist them in improving their communication and social skills and creating a learning environment with clear instructions.

Arguably, the authors suggest drama techniques can be more effective with students in fragile areas such as Palestine than those who reside in robust countries. Their ability to pump positive vibes may be **the main reason behind their success in improving participants' speaking skills. Yet, using these** techniques challenges instructors since they need a longer time than traditional techniques. In addition, implementing these techniques requires patient teachers and well-organised lesson plans. Accordingly, the authors suggest attending drama planning and usage training for interested educators to avoid misusage.

Finally, since this study consists of a few participants, the authors suggest interested researchers apply it to a larger sample from different ages and regions and compare the findings. The findings lead the authors to reconsider the distinctions between extrinsic and intrinsic learners. Do they experience comparable positive feelings, communication and social skills, and clear instructions? So, the authors recommend examining the differences between both kinds of learners.

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