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Drama-based role play activities to impact on students' speaking performance

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ABSTRACT

This article is aimed to explore the impact of drama-based role play activities on three domains of speaking performance–accuracy, pronunciation, and interactive communication of English as foreign language students at a university in the Mekong Delta and examine students' attitudes towards the use of role-play instruction. The experimental study was conducted with thirty freshmen who were assigned as one control and one experimental group. The data were collected from pre-and post-speaking tests and interviews. The quantitative analysis reveals that students in the treatment group made progress in their speaking performance whereas the level of speaking performance among students in the control group remained unchanged. Notably, interactive communication was significantly gained compared to accuracy and pronunciation within the intervention group. The qualitative analysis from interview data indicates that students held positive attitudes towards the implementation of drama-based role play activities.

1 INTRODUCTION

Many researchers believe that speaking is a core aspect in language education settings (Nunan, 1991; Ur, 1996; Kao and O'Neill, 1998). It is widely recognized that speaking involves interaction as students are given an opportunity to express their own ideas and thoughts about a particular topic. In other words, this indicates how successful they are in learning a foreign language or how they reflect their capacity to use the target language for interaction (Nunan, 1999; Richards and Rodgers, 2001; Ellis, 2003). In teaching and learning a foreign language, it is important to note that speaking is also known as influencing other language skills (Gass and Varonis, 1994). Specifically, speaking is viewed as a single most essential communication skill in reality, as Ulas (2008) points out:

Speaking is the most common and important means of providing communication among human beings. The key to successful communication is speaking nicely, efficiently and articulately, as well as using effective voice projection. Furthermore, speaking is linked to success in life, as it occupies an important position both individually and socially (p. 876).

In Vietnam, according to the National Foreign Language 2020 Project, it is aimed at reforming teaching and learning of foreign languages in the national education system. This government policy, therefore, stresses that by 2020 all learners are expected to have capacity of communicating with others in foreign languages successfully, particularly in English (Ministry of Education and Training, 2008). In particular, this government strategic plan highlights the importance of English at all levels of education (primary to tertiary) to respond to the growing needs of learners. However, the majority

of English majored students at the university under investigation were likely to feel insecure and reluctant to communicate or interact with other peers in the target language both inside and outside the classroom practices. This is probably due to limited time, low incentives, lack of English language use environment, and inappropriate instructional strategies. It is evident that lack of speaking competence is a disadvantage, which probably makes students lag far behind in the ever-increasingly dynamic world where the communicative ability is still dominant in language teaching and learning.

Given the importance of speaking skills, a wide range of instructional approaches or techniques have been, therefore, put forth with regard to enhancing students' oral production in English as a foreign language (EFL). Notably, drama has been deployed into language educational practice for a long time (Via, 1976; Smith, 1984; Whiteson, 1996; Kao and O'Neill, 1998; Dodson, 2002; Maley and Duff, 2005; Stinson and Freebody, 2006). The effects of drama on speaking outcome have been conducted by many researchers (e.g., Miccoli, 2003; Janudom and Wasanasomsithi, 2009; Iamsaard and Kerdpol, 2015). For example, a study by Miccoli (2003) was conducted with 37 students to investigate how drama activities influenced her students' oral skills in a Brazilian university. A number of tasks such as warm-ups, getting to know each other activities, dialogues, and role plays used in her speaking class over a 15-week period indicated that students' speaking competence increased, particularly in the aspects of structure, vocabulary and pronunciation. Another empirical study by Janudom and Wasnasomsithi (2009) who conducted a study with nonnative undergraduate students of the benefits of drama and questioning to enhance verbal communicative skills and students' attitudes towards these techniques. The results revealed these two techniques could improve students' speaking performance and their positive attitudes towards EFL learning. However, empirical research about the effects of drama-based role play activities on EFL students' speaking performance has not been yet conducted in Vietnam; therefore, this paper particularly focuses on how drama-based role play activities influence EFL students' speaking performance.

1.1 Speaking and its aspects

There are several definitions of speaking in relation to language teaching and learning in the literature (Bygate, 1987; Johnson, 1996; Burns and Joyce, 1997; Howarth, 2001; Brown, 2007). However, the study draws on the definition of speaking proposed by Johnson (1996) who describes speaking as a "*combinatorial skill*" that entails "*doing various things at the same time*" (p.155). This perspective involves communication discourse that enables learners to enhance their speaking competence. On the other hand, speaking can be manifested through two categories-speaking performance and speaking ability (Koizumi, 2005). Koizumi notes that speaking performance involves a case of oral production in real time or production of spoken language in an authentic context. Speaking ability, by contrast, is viewed as a more complex aspect which is assessed and observed through learners' performance either in written or oral forms.

Many researchers indicate that speaking performance, by nature, is a multi-faceted construct, and that four main aspects of speaking include syntactic complexity, accuracy, fluency, and lexicon (e.g., Skehan, 1998, 2009; Ellis, 2003; Ellis and Barkhuizen, 2005). These authors further stress that these four aspects are subsumed into the concepts of complexity, accuracy, and fluency. While complexity and fluency underlying speaking activities are likely to provide learners with opportunities to communicate effectively, accuracy may hinder these learners from speaking well in a variety of learning contexts where the target language is used.

Nevertheless, this paper draws on three aspects of speaking competence noted by Goh and Burns (2012). They are core speaking skills, knowledge of language and discourse, and communication strategies, as illustrated in Figure 1.

Fig. 1: Aspects of second language speaking competence (Goh and Burns, 2012, p. 53)

For the first aspect, knowledge of language and discourse is characterized by understanding of sound patterns of the language. In addition to pronunciation, it also includes the knowledge of grammar (e.g., spoken structures, grammatical features, vocabulary of the language), and speech acts; all of which contribute to appropriate language use (Goh and Burns, 2012).

The second aspect, core speaking skills, is related to learners' speaking fluency. Goh and Burns (2012) further claim that interaction management, a subskill, deals with negotiation of language use, such as constructing previous utterances, checking understanding, fixing communication breakdown, giving feedback, and generating conversations.

The third aspect, communication strategies, involves the implementation of tactics to avoid communication failure due to the limited knowledge by paraphrasing, circumlocution (cognitive strategies); to plan what to say and how to say before verbalizing (metacognitive strategies); and to check understanding, clarify and repeat an utterance (interaction strategies).

In this study, two components of speaking performance including knowledge of language and discourse, and core speaking skills are considered in the process of assessing participants' oral production. Specifically, the indicators of the knowledge of language and discourse involve the mastery of vocabulary and structures, and pronunciation, e.g., comprehensibility, intonation, stress, and sounds. Concerning the core speaking skills, interaction management is determined to be another descriptor which measures the ways students adopt to initiate and end a talk, and negotiate meanings of utterances towards meaningful learning. In doing so, drama based role play as a speaking task that affords students an opportunity to engage in an interactive learning environment is needed in a speaking class.

1.2   Drama-based role play activities

Drama in language teaching and learning has attracted a large number of teachers and scholars (Hubbard, 1983; Wessels, 1987; Elam, 2002; Winston, 2012). This increased interest attempts to address how drama can be integrated into foreign or second language learning (Belliveau and Kim, 2013). However, drama in language education is defined as any kind of activity where the learner is engaged in using language in a particular situation or a task in a communicative way (Cockett, 2000; Mok, 2012; Sirisrimangkorn and Suwanthep, 2013). Maley and Duff (2005) state that no matter what dramatic techniques-verbal or non-verbal learners are exposed to, their true values that the teacher needs to take into account are to help students to enrich imagination and communicate appropriately in various contexts rather than practice speaking a language. From this perspective, drama activities are simplified as 'doing' (Wessels, 1987), or 'acting a particular role' (Brash and Warnecke, 2009). These highlight what roles learners are playing while participating in a particular task rather

than presenting the activity itself. This is supported by Zafeiriadou (2009) who indicates that drama activities take place in interaction between participants during the process. The definitions of drama in language teaching and learning mentioned above indicate that drama refers to oral production to convey intended meaning in which role-playing is embedded.

Drama can be defined as an umbrella term referring to activities intertwined in teaching speaking through authentic interactive situations; notably, learners act out or perform a particular role (Davies, 1990; Sam, 1990; Brash and Warnecke, 2009). Davies (1990) also claims that these drama-based activities deployed into the second or foreign teaching and learning are subsumed into the term role-play involving drama, which benefit learners in some ways, particularly in the aspects of speaking performance if these activities are exploited effectively. Drama-based activities are characterized by the combination of a range of different activities such as role-play, improvisation, simulation, language games, and story-telling. They, thus, should be used flexibly in a classroom setting (Sun, 2003) because students can play roles that they may have in their own lives.

From the perspectives mentioned above, for the purposes of this study, drama-based role play activities refer to role-plays students use and then develop them in a natural and active way in order to improve their speaking performance.

1.3   Drama-based role play activities to foster speaking performance

Much research has shown that drama-based role play activities are strongly connected to language learning, particularly in the aspect of oral performance (Wagner, 1998; Maley and Duff; 2005; Magos and Politi, 2008; Brash and Warnecke, 2009; Belliveau and Kim, 2013; Sirisrimangkorn and Suwanthep, 2013; Cho, 2015). Given its importance to language speaking, accuracy, pronunciation, and interactive communication are mentioned in this paper.

The language learners, as Wagner (1998) proposes, are given opportunities to experience registers, lexicon, and speech patterns while they are taking their roles in the speaking class. Specifically, Neelands (1992) shows that a variety of make-believe scenarios is set up to enable learners, showing no apprehension of consequences, to freely utter word use, speech style, grammar, and vocabulary during classroom interactions. The different uses of language possibilities are tested to engage learners in ways without paying attention to criti-

cism of right or wrong. In terms of pronunciation, language learners using drama activities are involved in realistic experience in communicative discourse (e.g., Taylor, 2000; Miccoli, 2003; Maley and Duff, 2005). They strive to practice pronouncing the different sounds of words or letters correctly associated with intonations, rhythm in preparation stage; this therefore helps them represent their allocated roles expressively (Ashton-Hay, 2005). The practice of linguistic forms in free space, as a matter of fact, is of extreme necessity in learning speaking in a target language.

Additionally, drama activities afford a nonthreatening learning environment that stimulates learners to willingly socialize with one another (Via, 1976; Smith, 1984; Wessels, 1987); sustain volitional classroom engagement in an interesting classroom (Zafeiriadou, 2009). Also, the increased level of self-confidence in classroom participation and social interaction is produced within comfortable space of drama-based role play activities. Students are, therefore, empowered to take the ownership of their learning, and take risks to cross out, rephrase and edit, dig more new ideas, and convey their own perspectives as they "*shape, rehearse and modify the text*" (Stinson, 2006, p.4). Highly inventive mind of individuals can be activated via self-discovery in an attempt to produce more innovative ideas and vocabulary for situations connected to real-life; this thus assists effective talks to be extended over a period of time.

As learners play their roles practicing the language for different purposes in real-life related scenarios (Stinson, 2006), this drama-based activity can help increase their awareness of appropriate use of linguistic forms outside the classroom (Makita-Discekici, 1999; Mattevi, 2005). These views supported by Dougill (1987) and Taylor (2000) suggest that both stress-free environment and learning in context are created to meet learners' needs as well as increase their incentives to intrinsically participate in a given task. As a result, the spontaneous flow of oral reactions might continue throughout communication time while learners are involved in role-playing (Kao and O'Neill, 1998).

The review of literature of drama-role play activities in relation to speaking performance suggests that there is the need for investigation into drama-based role play activities relevant to this study. This paper, therefore, is aimed to explore the effects of drama-based instruction on EFL students' speaking performance development. It responds to the following research questions:

– To what extent do drama-based role play activities influence EFL students' speaking performance?

– What are students' attitudes towards the use of drama-based role play activities in a speaking class?

2 METHODOLOGY

A mixed-methods design was used to explore the impact of drama-based role play activities on students' speaking performance. For quantitative approach, a pre-test and post-test design was applied to investigate how drama-based role play treatment affected students' speaking performance. The participants in the treatment group experienced working with drama-based role plays whereas those in the control group received no treatment over an eight-week period. At the end of the study, students were interviewed to examine their attitudes towards the drama-based role play instruction in a speaking class. For the quantitative data analysis, t-tests involving descriptive statistics test, independent samples t-tests, and paired samples t-tests were adopted. Thematic analysis was used to analyze qualitative data from semi-structured interviews.

Thirty English-major freshmen participated in the study. Their age range is from 18 to 22. The students were randomly assigned into one control and one treatment group, 15 participants each. Twenty-four freshmen of similar level of English language ability and background to two study groups were involved in the pilot study.

Listening and speaking level 2 from the series *Q-skills for success*, published by Oxford University Press, 2010 was used as the main course textbook taught to two study groups at the university at the time of the study. The first four of seven units were taught based on lesson plans written by the researcher and evaluated by her supervisor and three university lecturers. The online resource of this textbook was also introduced to participants to ensure the clarity and purpose of research aims was obtained.

The instruments include four lesson plans using drama-based role play activities, pre-and post-tests and interviews. The lesson plans were adapted from Davies (1990). In the five-stage lesson plan (lead-in, presentation, practice, free practice, and wrap-up), there were different activities for students such as brainstorming ideas about a picture, reading a conversation, working in pairs, playing and swapping roles for a given real-life related topic. The pre-and post-speaking tests were devel-

oped basing on speaking outcomes in the *Q-skills for success*, Listening and Speaking 2 textbook and its online source. The format of the tests was identical, based on the VSTEP (Vietnamese Standardized Test of English Proficiency) speaking test including three parts (social interaction, solution discussion, and topic development). This is a popular kind of test currently used at the university for the final speaking course at the time of the study. The students were required to play their roles in Parts 2 and 3. In Part 2 (solution discussion), students were given a situation and worked in pairs, exchanging their ideas that interpret their choice of each of the three options provided by the teacher. So was the development of ideas to a topic given in Part 3 (topic development). Time for each part lasted approximately three to five minutes. The rating criteria for scoring students' performance in line with five-band scoring system with 1 as the lowest and 5 as the highest, adapted from the Preliminary Assessment Scales proposed by the Cambridge English Language Assessment, were used for both pre- and post-speaking tests. In the Cambridge speaking assessment scale, four criteria for marking a student's performance include accuracy, pronunciation, interactive communication, and discourse. These four criteria are delineated by six criteria from the VSTEP rubric: pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, fluency, content, and communication strategy. However, in this study, students' speaking performance was assessed according to three criteria: accuracy (vocabulary and grammar), pronunciation, and interactive communication. The rubric is weighed using a five-point Likert-scale for each criterion (1= Poor, 2= Average, 3= Fair, 4= Good, 5 = Excellent).

Semi-structured interviews with six students from the experimental group were conducted to explore their attitudes towards the use of drama-based role plays in a speaking class.

The study was conducted within 12 weeks. A pre-speaking test was conducted one week after the semester had started to ensure students became familiar with the research requirements and the form of speaking tests to correspond to the evaluation of students' speaking performance at a starting point on the basis of three criteria: accuracy, pronunciation and interactive communication. Drama-based role play activities were, then, implemented in the experimental group from the third to tenth weeks whereas the control group was exposed to the existing methods over the same period. A post-speaking test was administered to both groups in the eleventh week using the same criteria for the pre-speaking test. In the twelfth week, semi-structured interviews with six students in the treatment group were carried out.

3 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Students' speaking performance

Table 1 shows the pretest scores of students' speaking performance between the control and experimental groups (*M* = 2.98, *M* = 2.78, respectively). However, the mean difference at 0.2 was not significant as confirmed by the results of the t-test for independent samples (*t*=.61, *df*=28, *p* =.55). It could be concluded that students of the two groups started the program with a similar level of speaking performance.

Table 1: Independent samples t-test (pre-test)

Variable	Group	N	t	df	Mean	Sig. (2 tailed)	MD
Pretest	Control	15	.61	28	2.98	.55	.20
	Experimental	15			2.78		

As can be seen from Table 2, there was a slight difference in mean scores between control and experimental groups after the study. Specifically, the mean score of students' speaking performance in the treatment group (*M*=3.07) was higher than that

of the control group (*M*= 2.91). However, there was no significant difference between two study groups (*t* = -.50, *df* =28, *p*=.62). Therefore, it could be inferred that the level of two groups' speaking performance were almost the same.

Table 2: Independent samples t-test (post-test)

Variable	Group	N	t	df	Mean	Sig. (2 tailed)	MD
Posttest	Control	15	-.50	28	2.91	.62	-.16
	Experimental	15			3.07		

Table 3 below indicates that there was a slight variation in the means of students' speaking performance in the control group before and after the study. The mean score of the pretest (*M*=2.98) was

observed to be higher than that of the posttest (*M*=2.91) after the eight-week period. However, the result shows that there was no significant difference between pre- and post-test scores, with the

p. value above .05. It, therefore, denotes that the level of students' speaking performance before and after the study remained unchanged (*t*= 54, *df* =14, *p*=.60).

By contrast, Table 3 shows that the mean scores of student's speaking performance in the experimental group after the study (*M*=3.07) was higher than

that before the study (*M*=2.78). In addition, a statistically significant mean difference in students' speaking performance was found between a pretest and a posttest (*p*=.02). Thus, this result means that after the study students' speaking performance level in the experimental group was higher than that of the control group (*t*=-2.69, *df*=14, *p*=.0.2).

Table 3: Paired sample t-test (pre- and post-test)

Variable	Pretest	Posttest	The difference of pretest and posttest					
	Mean	**Mean**	**N**	**Mean**	**SD**	**t**	**df**	**Sig.**
Control	2.98	2.91	15	.07	.47	.54	14	.60
Experimental	2.78	3.07	15	-.29	.42	-2.69	14	.02

3.2 Students' level of accuracy, pronunciation and interactive communication

Table 4 shows the results regarding the means of

accuracy, pronunciation, and communicative interaction within the treatment group at the two points of measurement after the paired sample t-test was conducted.

Table 4: Paired sample t-test (pre- and post-tests)

Group	Speaking components	Variable	N	Mean	SD	t	df	Sig. (2tailed)
Experimental	Accuracy	Pretest	15	2.80	.56	-1.38	14	.19
		Posttest	15	3.00				
	Pronunciation	Pretest	15	2.47	.41	-1.87	14	.08
		Posttest	15	2.67				
	Interactive communication	Pretest	15	3.07	.64	-2.82	14	.01
		Posttest	15	3.53				

As shown in Table 4, the average posttest scores of accuracy (*M*= 3.0) and pronunciation (*M*=2.67) increased, but these two aspects of speaking performance showed that there was no significant difference after the study (*t*=-1.38, *df*=14, *p*=.19; *t*=-1.87, *df*=14, *p*=0.8, respectively). Thus, it could be said that the pretest and posttest levels of accuracy and pronunciation were similar. By contrast, with regard to interactive communication, the mean score after the study by far increased (*M*=3.53), as compared to that of accuracy and of pronunciation. Unlike accuracy and pronunciation, there was statistically significant difference between the pretest and posttest scores with regard to students' interactive communication (*p*=.01). In other words, students' level of interactive communication after the study was much higher than that before the study.

3.3 Students' attitudes towards drama-based role plays

Qualitative analysis from semi-structured interviews revealed that the six participating students in the treatment group had positive attitudes towards the use of drama-based role play activities in a speaking class they were taking. They all recognized that role plays allowed them to learn more through interactions and to keep the conversations going. For example, Mai said:

Well, I am aware that I usually make errors about grammar structures and vocabulary. Now, I have learned lots of things from my friends, feel confident, and talked more naturally when we took and switched our roles given by the teacher (Mai, interview)

Mai's words suggest that role playing seemed to encourage her to speak more English in class for progress in her learning process rather than waiting for being called by the teacher to answer questions. This also indicates that she believed role-play instruction was related to building confidence and being more creative in learning new things.

Lan highlighted the importance of interactions in a drama-based role play class by stating,

Because you [the teacher] often ask the class to develop a conversation for future (would be) situations so when doing a role-play, I can react to that situation. I can develop them in a proper way because I know what to say next while speaking to my friend and also find more ideas (Lan, interview).

In Lan's comments, role-playing would enable her to act out spontaneously while maintaining the conversation with her friend. Also, in doing her role, this scenario let her act out what came naturally and in real communication instead of being put in a predetermined setting or set discourse.

Hung mentioned the knowledge of sociolinguistics such as behaviors and linguistic forms could be applied into different contexts effectively by saying:

When we are asked to play a role of a figure or that of applying for a job in a company, this helps us know how to deal with a situation. Also, we can use English appropriately, like grammar or structures in a real situation and then replay such task as it is in real life (Hung, interview).

Hung's views indicate that meaningful learning was likely to take place bridging a gap between role-plays and real-life applicability.

When asked about the choice between traditional method of teaching speaking and drama-based role play activities, role-playing was the most favored technique. Cuong shared his view near the end of the study:

Doing role-plays is fun and creative. I am not put under constraints or pressure like I used to be in the traditional methods. While speaking English with my peer, I can develop or extend the dialogue freely by creating new stories or new roles in a similar situation (Cuong, interview).

In this quote, this student indicated the value of drama-based role play activities when addressing creativity, feeling of comfort, and sense of self-study in order to have a new and interesting learning environment.

The findings from this study indicate that the participating students in the experimental group performed far better in the posttest than the pretest while the levels of students in the control condition remained unchanged before and after the study. On the basis of this study, it could be possible to state that drama-based role play instruction was practically shown to be a fruitful and beneficial technique in helping promote students' speaking performance. This finding is in line with studies by Miccoli (2003), Mok (2012), and Sirisrimangkorn and Suwanthep (2013) who claim that students' oral proficiency could be enhanced as a result of implementation of drama activities. In other words, drama-based role plays play an important part in helping students to voice themselves while communicating the target language.

It may be that student gains in speaking performance resulted from an integral pedagogical component which addresses a process-based role play instead of product-based approach. This pattern suggests that students were exposed to speaking practice in everyday lesson not only in class but also beyond the walls. In particular, students were given time to rehearse or practice in order for linguistic repertoire such as vocabulary, structures, and pronunciation to be enriched. One more reason for this increased language production could be that students could be more aware of their speaking abilities and then made some adjustments for the new role, all of which were supposed to move their speaking skills forward.

Owing to the dynamic and meaningful nature of drama-based practices which underscored oral practice through reality-related interactive activities, students might feel more enthusiastic to participate and use the language as a means for communication in given scenarios rather than learning the set language. As Stinson (2006) claims that, learners, playing themselves or others' roles, have varied opportunities to approach and practice the language for different purposes in real-life related scenarios. Therefore, they could have the dialogues developed by themselves employed into the outside world naturally. This reason might play a part of speaking improvement.

Another reason for the improvement in the quality of speaking performance could be explained in terms of favorable learning environment. Wessels (1987) states that drama activities "*break down the barriers between teacher and student*" (p. 14). Thus, through interacting with the teacher, students were given an opportunity to practice speaking with their peers. It was student-student interactions that allow them to develop language learning and social skills in class where the teacher-researcher was a facilitator. This finding supports Brash and his colleagues' (2009) views that students experience oral skills and interact with each other in language use comfortably.

One more explanation for the enhancement of oral performance concerned the integration of both receptive skills (e.g. listening and reading) and productive skills (e.g. speaking and writing) in a drama classroom, an important aspect of language learning. Prior to writing down the dialogue for a conversation, students were required to read or listen to a text for discussion through which the background information and the language that they might need were collected. When the information exchange took place, the negotiated interaction allowed learners to "*think about language and learn a language*" (Gass and Selinker, 2001, p.302). Particularly, students with low language competence could make some appropriate modifications when there were some mismatches between the language that they produced and the output that the high language proficiency students were using. Also, once students were given a forum to practice

English language use and modify their assigned roles, the integration of the four language skills was likely to promote students' oral abilities.

It is noted that significant gains of interactive communication were found in the pre- and post-tests compared to vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation. This finding suggests that students, with less English proficiency, could start a conversation and develop more ideas. However, it was noted to be different from previous research conducted by Miccoli (2003) who found the accuracy-related level of speaking skill was more enhanced. Yet, it was unclear which level was most developed. There were some specific factors that might contribute to the gains of interactive communication by the participating students in this study. It could be that drama-based role play activities mainly focus on student-student interactions rather than error correction. Students, thus, could feel at ease to get involved in the activity, use the language freely regardless of errors made as long as they could get communicative message across. In other words, this simulation highlighted that language functions were more important than linguistic forms (Davies, 1990), and that role plays are "*exercises where students can improvise some kind of behavior towards the other role characters*" (Paulston, 1992, p.60).

The findings from semi-structured interviews showed that six participating students had positive attitudes towards the use of drama-based role play activities in a speaking class. This finding supports those by Miccoli (2003) and Sirisrimangkorn and Suwanthep (2013) who found that students perceived the positive effects of the use of drama-based role plays since they experienced improvements in oral skills and increased confidence in speaking English.

The explanation for the positive attitudes to the implementation of drama into an oral class reported by all six students was probably relevant to the considerable improvements they made in their speaking performance in the learning process. It was worth noting that a comfortable learning environment might reduce anxiety in speaking English and increase self-confidence among learners, as Dodson (2002) believes. Students, thus, were willing to express their voices and learn from each other with regard to speaking aspects which include vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation.

4 CONCLUSIONS

The findings provide insights into the impact of drama-based role plays on promoting students' speaking performance, particularly on the aspect of

interactive communication. This impact also raises teachers' awareness of learners' diverse needs, preferences and styles and encourages teachers to find appropriate instructional approaches to integrate drama-based role play activities into speaking classes and other aspects of English use such as vocabulary, grammar, or phonetics. Once students are given a forum to act out their roles through real-life contexts, interactive tasks, or their speaking performance, motivation and interest in learning how to use English can be enhanced. The application of drama into the language classroom practices is, yet, probably a challenge, the nature of drama-based role plays needs to be considered and presented in curriculum and instruction so as to allow students to take greater responsibility for their learning in dynamic, engaging, interactive and meaningful ways.

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