PRIMARY SCHOOL EFL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS ABOUT BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES OF USING DRAMA IN SPEAKING CLASSES

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Abstract: This study explores primary-level EFL teachers' perceptions about benefits and challenges of using drama to teach speaking in a Central Vietnam province. Employing a qualitative design, 12 Grade-3 English teachers were interviewed, and 24 lessons were observed. Thematic analysis revealed three key benefits: drama situates language in authentic contexts to enhance communicative competence; it builds learner confidence and creativity through role-play and empathetic immersion; and it fosters real-world relevance and collaborative engagement. Teachers also reported five challenges: student anxiety and limited preparation; proficiency disparities within classes; insufficient classroom time for implementation; limited drama facilitation and classroom management skills among teachers; and resource shortages. These findings corroborate prior research on drama's efficacy and provide new insights into the affective, pedagogical, and systemic barriers primary-level teachers face. The study highlights the need for targeted professional development, tailored task design, and resource support to realize drama's potential in young-learner EFL contexts.

Keywords: Drama; EFL teachers' perceptions; primary school; speaking classes

NHẬN THỨC CỦA GIÁO VIÊN TIẾNG ANH TIỂU HỌC VỀ LỢI ÍCH VÀ THÁCH THỨC CỦA VIỆC SỬ DỤNG KỊCH TRONG CÁC LỚP KỸ NĂNG NÓI

Tóm tắt: Nghiên cứu này khám phá nhận thức của giáo viên tiếng Anh tiểu học về lợi ích và thách thức khi sử dụng kịch để dạy kỹ năng nói ở một tỉnh miền Trung Việt Nam. Sử dụng thiết kế định tính, nghiên cứu này đã tiến hành phỏng vấn 12 giáo viên tiếng Anh lớp 3 và quan sát 24 bài dạy của họ. Phân tích dữ liệu theo chủ đề cho thấy ba lợi ích chính: kịch đặt ngôn ngữ vào bối cảnh thực tế để nâng cao năng lực giao tiếp; kịch xây dựng sự tự tin và khả năng sáng tạo của người học thông qua nhập vai và hoạt động đắm chìm cảm xúc; và kịch tạo mối liên quan với thế giới thực và thúc đẩy học sinh tham gia hợp tác. Giáo viên cũng cho thấy năm thách thức khi sử dụng kịch: sự lo lắng của học sinh và hạn chế về chuẩn bị cho hoạt động kịch; sự chênh lệch về trình độ trong các lớp học; không đủ thời gian trên lớp để thực hiện hoạt động kịch; kỹ năng quản lý và tạo điều kiện cho kịch của giáo viên hạn chế; và thiếu hụt nguồn lực. Những phát hiện trong nghiên cứu này xác nhận hiệu quả của kịch trong các nghiên cứu trước đây và cung cấp những hiểu biết mới liên quan đến các rào cản về tình cảm, sư phạm và hệ thống mà giáo viên tiểu học phải đối mặt. Vì vậy, nghiên cứu này nhấn mạnh đến nhu cầu phát triển chuyên môn có mục tiêu, thiết kế nhiệm vụ phù hợp và hỗ trợ nguồn lực để hiện thực hoá tiềm năng sư phạm của kịch trong bối cảnh giảng dạy tiếng Anh cho học sinh tiểu học.

Từ khoá: Kịch; nhận thức của giáo viên tiếng Anh; tiểu học; lớp kỹ năng nói

1. Introduction

Effective language acquisition begins with learners' conscious awareness of key linguistic features, which they must notice before internalizing them. As Nunan (1991) emphasizes, language learning success is gauged by one's ability to engage in conversational exchanges in the target language. Reflecting this communicative priority, Vietnam's English Curriculum in the 2018 National Curriculum for General Education prioritizes listening and speaking at the primary level, ensuring early exposure to oral English and laying the foundation for subsequent reading and writing development.

However, meeting these goals requires pedagogical approaches that move beyond traditional drills and help learners transfer classroom knowledge into spontaneous speech. One of the promising methods in language teaching is the use of drama activities, ranging from simple pantomime to structured role-plays and simulations, which are effective in improving oral language skills through interactive and practical communication scenarios. Despite their potential to enhance speaking proficiency, the integration of drama activities in English teaching at Vietnamese primary schools remains limited due to numerous factors, including insufficient awareness of their benefits, scarcity of instructional materials and teachers' unfamiliarity with drama-based methods. Consequently, exploring teachers' perceptions of drama and their practices in implementing it in the classroom is essential.

This study aims to investigate how primary school EFL teachers in a Central Vietnam province perceive the benefits and challenges of using drama in speaking classes. It addresses the following research question: What benefits and challenges do Vietnamese primary school EFL teachers perceive when using drama in speaking classes?

2. Literature review

2.1 Drama in English language teaching

In English language teaching, drama encompasses a spectrum of improvised and scripted activities, such as mime, role-plays, simulations, and dramatized storytelling that engage learners in purposeful, context-rich use of the target language. As Hubbard, Jones, Thornton, & Wheeler (1986) point out, drama refers to various oral activities that "have an element of creativity present" (p. 317), positioning learners as active meaning-makers rather than passive recipients. Davies (1990) further emphasizes that drama "puts language into context" (p. 97), encouraging students' fluency and communicative competence. McGovern (2017) identifies three principal modalities of drama pedagogy in the second language classroom: theatrical performance, process drama, and games with improvisation. Theatrical performance involves students preparing and presenting a pre-written script. Process drama engages both teachers and students in sustained, role-based improvisational activities for educational purposes rather than public presentation. Finally, games and improvisations encompass a diverse set of theatre-inspired exercises, often termed "theatre games" (McGovern, 2017, p. 6) adapted specifically to be used in second language contexts. Taken together, drama extends beyond mere theatrical performance to function as a pedagogical methodology that facilitates meaningful language acquisition.

In this article, the terms "drama", "drama-based activities", and "drama activities" are used interchangeably.

2.2 Benefits of using drama in English speaking classes

Integrating drama into the language classroom can yield a range of pedagogical benefits, as detailed below.

Drama activities support linguistic, cognitive, and affective learning outcomes. By embedding role-plays, improvisations, and storytelling into lessons, drama promotes fluency, vocabulary development, and pronunciation accuracy while simultaneously stimulating creative thinking and problem-solving (Mordecai, 1985). These activities have an intrinsic purpose, i. e. students must negotiate meaning and collaborate to achieve classroom goals, thereby heightening motivation and ensuring meaningful engagement. In this immersive context, learners practice authentic communication and develop confidence in expressing ideas, which in turn strengthens both their language proficiency and social-emotional intelligence.

Drama also cultivates essential social and personal qualities beyond academic skills. Collaborative drama tasks foster responsibility and teamwork as students co-construct scenes and negotiate roles (Mordecai, 1985). By exploring diverse perspectives through character play, learners build empathy, tolerance, and acceptance, i.e., the traits vital for effective interpersonal interaction. Furthermore, the supportive "safe space" of drama encourages risk-taking and resilience: students experiment with language and nonverbal expression without fear of judgment, nurturing a growth mindset and self-confidence (Bas, 2008; Fernandez & Coil, 1986). As Gaudart (1990) notes, drama can help make lessons dynamic and engaging, thus sustaining learners' enthusiasm for English learning.

Last but not least, drama offers teachers valuable insights into student understanding and needs. When teachers observe and facilitate drama activities, they gain real-time feedback on learners' linguistic strengths and areas for support (Mordecai, 1985). This diagnostic function enables teachers to tailor subsequent instruction, address individual challenges, and refine their pedagogical strategies. Thus, drama serves not only as a student-centered methodology but also as a reflective tool for ongoing teacher development and more responsive classroom practice.

2.3 Possible challenges of using drama in English speaking classes

Teachers may face several challenges when incorporating drama into English speaking classes, particularly in planning, organizing, and guiding students' engagement in drama-based activities. Effectively integrating drama into speaking classes demands careful lesson design, yet many teachers struggle to balance open-ended creativity with clear pedagogical structure. As Sæbo (2009) observes, without well-scaffolded tasks and explicit learning objectives, student-led dramatizations can drift into superficial enactments that neither reinforce target language forms nor deepen conceptual understanding. Teachers must therefore invest significant time in designing role-plays and improvisations that both engage learners and align with curricular goals.

In addition, inadequate integration of students' personal ideas and experiences into drama activities is a significant challenge for teachers in the teaching process. Connecting drama tasks to learners' real-world contexts is critical for meaningful engagement, but teachers often find it challenging to integrate students' backgrounds and interests into dramatic scenarios. Chauhan (2004) argues that when personal ideas and experiences are not deliberately woven into drama activities, learning outcomes become disjointed and fail to foster authentic communication.

Moreover, maintaining classroom management during spontaneous improvisations requires clear routines and strong facilitation skills; without these, students may become distracted or overwhelmed, undermining both language and social-emotional learning objectives (Sæbo, 2009).

Finally, the pedagogical impact of drama hinges on both teacher confidence and student skill in dramatic expression. Teachers with limited training in drama techniques may default to highly structured exercises, such as fixed scripts or minimal teacher intervention, that curtail opportunities for genuine dialogue and collaborative meaning-making (Neelands & Goode, 2000). Similarly, students unfamiliar with role-playing conventions often struggle to develop coherent characters or sustain meaningful plotlines, which can stall language practice and reduce motivation (Neelands & Goode, 2000). Addressing these proficiency gaps requires targeted professional development for teachers and incremental skill building for students to ensure that drama activities fulfill their communicative and pedagogical purposes.

2.4 Previous study

Research highlights the effectiveness of drama-based activities in enhancing students' communicative competence and fostering positive attitudes toward learning. Vukojević (2023) conducted a large-scale experimental study involving 344 fourth-grade students in Croatia to compare the communicative competence of two groups: a control group receiving traditional instruction and an experimental group engaged in drama activities during Croatian language lessons. The research employed written composition assessments to evaluate competence across content, language, and handwriting. The findings revealed statistically significant improvement in content and language among the experimental group, underscoring the efficacy of drama-based approaches in nurturing expressive language skills at the primary level. Similarly, Almutairi and Alfarwan (2024) implemented a quasi-experimental design with 60 first-year Saudi female university students enrolled in a speaking and listening course. Divided into experimental and control groups, the students underwent a four-week intervention wherein the experimental group received drama-based instruction. Pre- and post-tests measured speaking performance in terms of accuracy, pronunciation, vocabulary, and fluency. The results demonstrated a marked improvement in all aspects among the experimental group, highlighting drama's potential in enhancing oral communication skills in higher education EFL contexts. Nguyen (2023) adopted a mixed-methods quasi-experimental approach to examine the effects of drama-based activities on speaking performance among 60 eleventh-grade students at a high school in Can Tho, Vietnam. Quantitative data were obtained from pre- and post-tests evaluating five speaking components: grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, fluency, and discourse management. Additionally, qualitative data were collected through student questionnaires and interviews, revealing that learners not only achieved notable gains in speaking competence, in discourse management, but also expressed highly favorable attitudes towards drama-based learning. These findings confirm that drama can simultaneously strengthen linguistic accuracy and foster learner motivation and confidence.

Drama activities have also demonstrated a significant impact on students' emotional engagement and affective development. Tosun and Demir (2024) investigated the use of a 21-hour creative drama program to support first-grade students' adaptation to school in Turkey. Using both pre- and post-intervention surveys and individual interviews with students, parents, and teachers, the study found that creative drama improved students' social interaction, empathy,

and rule compliance. Parents also reported enhanced understanding of their children and stronger school-family ties. In a similar vein, Ütkür-Güllühan, Bekiroğlu, and Emral (2023) used a Solomon four-group experimental design involving 100 third-grade students in Istanbul to explore the effects of online creative drama on school-related happiness and enjoyment. Using validated scales on happiness and fun, the study concluded that students in the experimental groups experienced significantly higher levels of emotional well-being and enjoyment than their peers in the control groups, demonstrating drama's effectiveness even in online formats during pandemic-related disruptions. Alam and Al-Hawamdeh (2022) offered a broader pedagogical perspective through a quantitative study that examined 1003 EFL students' views and the practical challenges teachers face in integrating drama. The study included a structured survey distributed to students and an analysis of classroom practices, focusing on the strategies of role-play, visualization, and classification. While students reported high engagement and improved communication, the study also identified key barriers faced by teachers, such as limited training, time constraints, and difficulties in improvisation. Although the study addressed teacher challenges, it did so from a student-centered viewpoint and lacked an in-depth analysis of how these challenges influenced teacher decision-making and pedagogical implementation.

Although these studies collectively underscore the pedagogical benefits of drama-based activities in enhancing EFL learners' speaking skills, emotional well-being, and engagement (Almutairi & Alfarwan, 2024; Nguyen, 2023; Tosun & Demir, 2024; Ütkür-Güllühan et al., 2023; Vukojević, 2023), they predominantly focus on student outcomes. Teacher perspectives—particularly those of primary school teachers—remain significantly underexplored. While Nguyen (2023) incorporated some qualitative insights from teachers, the primary emphasis remained on student performance. Similarly, although Alam and Al-Hawamdeh (2022) acknowledged the challenges teachers encounter, they did not directly examine how teachers' own perceptions, beliefs, and contextual realities shape their use of drama. Considering that teachers serve as key agents in adapting and implementing innovative pedagogies, a deeper understanding of their views and experiences is critical.

Despite the growing body of evidence affirming the effectiveness of drama in teaching EFL speaking, there is a distinct lack of research that investigates EFL teachers' perceptions of the benefits and challenges of using drama in speaking classes. This gap is particularly noticeable in primary schools, where teaching is often shaped by curriculum demands, children's developmental needs, and limited classroom resources. Most existing research has not used a combination of qualitative data collection methods, such as in-depth classroom observations combined with semi-structured interviews, to explore how teachers perceive and evaluate drama activities in real-world classroom settings. Addressing this gap is essential to improve teacher training, encourage long-term teaching innovations, and ensure drama activities fit well with the practical conditions of primary EFL education.

3. Research methodology

3.1 Research approach

In order to answer the research question, the researcher employed a qualitative research approach to explore primary school EFL teachers' perceptions about the benefits and challenges

of using drama in speaking classes. The qualitative method was chosen to uncover the intricacies and complexities of teachers' perceptions and experiences.

3.2 Research participants

The participants were 12 EFL teachers from primary schools in a province in Central Vietnam. These teachers, representing central and rural areas, used the same textbook, *Global Success 3*, were selected to ensure consistency in instructional materials. The teachers voluntarily participated and provided in-depth insights through 12 interviews and 24 classroom observations.

3.3 Data collection instruments and data collection procedure

Semi-structured interviews and classroom observations were used to collect data in the study.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted two weeks prior to classroom observations. They were conducted in Vietnamese with 12 Grade 3 English teachers from primary schools in a province in Central Vietnam. The interviews took place in person at each teacher's school, which provided a familiar and comfortable setting for the interviewees. The interviews began with general background questions so that the researcher could build rapport with the interviewees before delving into specific topics related to their perceptions of drama-based teaching. The interview questions explored the teachers' understanding of drama, its perceived benefits, and challenges in implementation. The flexible interview format allowed for follow-up on interesting responses, encouraging detailed insights.

The classes observed were selected based on prior confirmation from the teachers regarding the integration of drama activities in their lessons after direct discussions. An observation sheet was used to guide the process, focusing on aspects such as teacher instructions, drama activities, student engagement, interactions, and the classroom environment. Notes were taken on teacher-student dynamics, the effectiveness of activities, and notable classroom occurrences.

3.4 Data analysis

The recorded interviews were transcribed and analyzed using thematic analysis. Initial impressions, recurring themes, and significant quotes were noted during the review process. Open coding was conducted to identify and label key concepts and patterns, which were further refined into significant themes aligned with the research objectives, focusing on the benefits and challenges of using drama activities as perceived by the teachers.

Observation notes were transcribed and analyzed similarly. Thematic analysis also began with open coding, followed by descriptive coding to categorize observable behaviors and instructional methods. Patterns of using drama activities were identified and compared across all observation sessions.

Participant anonymity and confidentiality were strictly maintained throughout all phases of the study. During data collection and analysis, any personally identifying information, such as names or other unique descriptors, was noted and then removed from interview transcripts. In the presentation of the findings, the participants are cited exclusively by number codes in all verbatim quotations.

4. Findings

4.1 EFL teachers' perceptions about the benefits of using drama in their English-speaking classes

The analysis of interview and classroom observation data revealed three interrelated themes elucidating why teachers value drama in primary EFL speaking classes: (1) enhanced students' communicative competence, (2) increased students' confidence and creative expression, and (3) real-world relevance and collaborative engagement.

4.1.1 Enhanced students' communicative competence

The teachers repeatedly stressed that drama situates language within authentic contexts, enabling pupils to negotiate meaning and practice target structures in cohesive discourse. As one teacher remarked, "Drama activities enhance learners' English communication ability because they have the opportunity to use English based on context and real situations" (Teacher 1). This contextualization supports skill development: "It helps students develop language skills effectively. Practice and develop students' speaking skills through simulating and performing roles" (Teacher 4). Another teacher affirmed drama's capacity to bridge classroom learning and everyday life: "Drama is a method for students to practice conveying messages, role-playing, storytelling, and presenting. They can apply what they practiced from drama activities in class to real life" (Teacher 8). Equally important is drama's facilitation of natural, meaningful performance. "Elementary school children can completely perform drama activities well… It helps students to use the language naturally" (Teacher 2), while "When my students perform a drama, they need to memorize lines and apply the vocabulary and grammar we've been studying in a way that's meaningful to them" (Teacher 7). Classroom observations substantiated these teachers' ideas. In a "At the zoo" lesson, Teacher 1 guided students through a role-play of buying tickets and describing animals, which prompted learners to rehearse and apply key vocabulary and sentence structures in cohesive mini-dialogues that mirrored real-world exchanges.

4.1.2 Increased students' confidence and creative expression

Besides language gains, drama emerged as a powerful catalyst for students' self-assurance and imaginative language use. One teacher remarked that "Drama helps students become more confident in communicating and expressing opinions in real life because children have… participated in similar situations at school, increasing their creativity and developing cooperation skills" (Teacher 2). This confidence extended to pronunciation and fluency: "Drama helps students to be more confident when speaking, improve their pronunciation and encourage creativity in the use of language" (Teacher 10). The teachers also highlighted drama's role in empathetic immersion: "Through practicing roles in drama, students have the opportunity to experience the real situations, emotions, and thoughts of the characters in the story" (Teacher 4). Such immersion fosters a deeper connection to both language and content. Furthermore, drama is interesting and appropriate for young learners: "Drama is suitable for the characteristics of young learners and helps them get acquainted, practice with excitement and use the language naturally and effectively" (Teacher 7). The observational data in this study illustrated the teachers' above assertions. In the "Our Toys" simulation, Teacher 4's toy shop scenario simulation encouraged even the most reticent students to invent dialogues: selecting, describing, and 'selling' their

favorite toys. This activity visibly enhanced their oral fluency and willingness to volunteer, showing drama's effect on student confidence.

4.1.3 Real-world relevance and collaborative engagement

Finally, the teachers emphasized drama's ability to anchor lessons in pupils' lived experiences, thereby rendering instruction purposeful and intrinsically motivating. "Drama helps students connect the information they have learned with real-world experiences, by creating lots of scenarios in real life" (Teacher 9), one teacher explained. This relevance led to tangible enthusiasm: "When I integrate drama activities into the learning content, students will be more excited to participate… because they are able to move and talk freely instead of just sitting and reading" (Teacher 6). The teachers also praised drama's scaffolded complexity: "Drama activities are spread throughout the learning process, pushing the pace from simple to complex. They are suitable for the level of students from easy to difficult, so students can easily understand the content of the lesson" (Teacher 8). Collaborative engagement further enriched the classroom dynamic: "Students… work together on a common task, practicing skills and social interaction for teamwork" (Teacher 1). In practice, Teacher 7's "Outdoor activities" lesson exemplified this synergy. By staging a playground planning task, Teacher 7 required groups of students to negotiate and agree on games, thereby practicing future-tense structures and cooperative problem-solving in a format that closely reflected their everyday interactions. This blend of authenticity and engagement typifies the unique contribution of drama to speaking instruction.

Overall, primary EFL teachers perceive drama not merely as a supplementary activity. Instead, they view it as a dynamic pedagogical tool that (a) reinforces authentic communicative practice, (b) fosters learner confidence and creative expression, and (c) situates language learning in meaningful, real-life contexts. These benefits highlight drama's distinctive capacity to enrich speaking instruction in young learner classrooms.

4.2 EFL teachers' perceptions about the challenges of using drama in their English-speaking classes

While primary EFL teachers consider drama as a useful method to develop speaking skills, they also encounter significant obstacles when implementing drama-based activities. Analysis of interviews and classroom observations revealed five interrelated challenge areas: (1) student affective barriers, (2) varied proficiency levels, (3) time constraints, (4) teacher skill limitations, and (5) resource shortages.

4.2.1 Students' affective barriers

The teachers reported that many students feel anxious about performing before peers, which limits their participation and undermines drama's interactive aims. As one teacher noted, "Many students are shy and afraid to speak in front of others, so they avoid joining group performances" (Teacher 2). As observed in Teacher 6's class, a female student repeatedly refused a lead role, opting instead to "be an audience" because she was "afraid of saying the wrong thing and being laughed at." Similarly, during Teacher 4's group play, only the most extroverted students volunteered, while others remained silent and avoided the front of the room. Apart from students' anxiety and lack of confidence, the teachers pointed to students' insufficient preparation, both linguistic and emotional, as a barrier to seamless drama enactment. Unprepared

students disrupt lesson flow and require additional scaffolding, diverting attention from the intended learning objectives.

4.2.2 Students' varied proficiency levels

The teachers found it difficult to craft drama tasks that simultaneously challenge advanced learners and support weaker peers. "In one class, some students speak English confidently, while others hardly say a word. It's hard to plan one activity that fits all" (Teacher 5). Another teacher remarked, "I feel frustrated when some students don't fully participate. This makes group activities harder when the students' skill levels are so different" (Teacher 1). In an improvised class scene observed, the confident students quickly assumed leading roles with expressive gestures, whereas less proficient pupils spoke softly and avoided eye contact, highlighting how unequal participation can marginalize some learners and dilute both linguistic and collaborative gains.

4.2.3 Time constraints

Implementing drama activities demands substantial class time for explanation, rehearsal, performance, and feedback, which often exceeds the typical 40-minute period. As Teacher 5 explained, "As a teacher at a key school of the district, I often use complex drama activities, so time management is a big obstacle." Teacher 1 echoed this concern: "Preparing a drama activity not only needs to be attractive but also needs to be realistic and close to the lesson content. Therefore, the 40-minute period is not enough. I also do not take into account the time to prepare the content carefully before coming to class."

4.2.4 Teachers' skill limitations

Effective drama facilitation requires strong classroom management, improvisation expertise, and the ability to provide on-the-spot linguistic guidance. Many participating teachers, who were often early in their careers, reported limited training in these areas during the interviews. Without sufficient confidence in directing drama, teachers may default to rote exercises that fail to capitalize on drama's interactive potential.

4.2.5 Resource shortages

Finally, systemic constraints in Central Vietnam's primary schools limit access to props, suitable performance spaces, and printed materials. Although this situation has improved significantly thanks to the attention and policies of the state, the teachers noted that economic limitations of families and schools may lead to a lack of facilities, equipment, and teaching support materials. In the absence of basic resources, drama activities can become temporary and less engaging, reducing their pedagogical impact.

These five challenge domains, including students' affective barriers, proficiency disparities, insufficient time, teachers' skill gaps, and resource shortages, interact to complicate the seamless integration of drama in primary EFL speaking classes. Recognizing and addressing these obstacles is essential for designing targeted training, realistic activity frameworks, and policy interventions that enable the teachers to harness drama's full instructional potential.

5. Discussion

5.1 Discussion of findings on EFL teachers' perceptions about the benefits of using drama in their English-speaking classes

5.1.1 Enhanced students' communicative competence

The teachers in this study unanimously reported that drama embeds language practice within meaningful, contextualized scenarios, thereby strengthening students' ability to use coherent and purposeful discourse. This aligns closely with Vukojević's (2023) experimental findings that Croatian primary school pupils exposed to drama outperformed peers on content-based and language-based composition assessments. Similarly, Nguyen (2023) found that mixed-method drama interventions yielded significant gains across five measures of speaking performance: grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, fluency, and discourse management, emphasizing drama's capacity to strengthen both accuracy and complexity. Classroom observations in this study extend these findings by illustrating how role-plays (e.g., ticket purchasing at the zoo in one observed class) prompt students to rehearse target structures in unscripted mini-dialogues, thereby bridging the gap between systematic form-focused instruction and spontaneous, contextualized use. In doing so, drama functions as an integrative pedagogy that simultaneously addresses linguistic form, functional use, and learner engagement.

5.1.2 Increased students' confidence and creative expression

Besides measurable language gains, the teachers highlighted drama's affective support, particularly its role in cultivating learner self-confidence and imaginative language use. These perceptions resonate with Almutairi and Alfarwan's (2024) quasi-experimental study of Saudi EFL undergraduates, which recorded marked improvements in pronunciation accuracy and willingness to communicate following drama-based instruction. Tosun and Demir (2024) similarly documented heightened empathy and social interaction among Turkish primary pupils after a creative drama program. Observation of the "Our Toys" simulation in this study further illustrates how even reticent children can be encouraged to act out lively dialogues when the affective barrier is lowered. By getting pupils to inhabit roles, drama creates a supportive environment in which young learners' confidence and creative expression are cultivated.

5.1.3 Real-world relevance and collaborative engagement

A third key insight concerned drama's capacity to bridge classroom content and students' lived experiences, thus fostering intrinsic motivation and peer collaboration. The reflection from a teacher that "Drama helps students connect the information they have learned with real-world experiences" echoes Ütkür-Güllühan et al.'s (2023) finding that online drama activities boosted primary pupils' enjoyment and engagement, even under pandemic conditions. Teacher 6's emphasis on freedom of movement ("…they are able to move and talk freely instead of just sitting and reading") aligns with Deweyian principles of experiential learning (Dewey, 1938) and underpins observations of heightened enthusiasm during drama tasks. Moreover, Teacher 8's note on scaffolded complexity, "Drama activities…push the pace from simple to complex", underscores the adaptability of drama scaffolds, a point also stressed by Alam and Al-Hawamdeh (2022), who reported that role-play, visualization, and classification tasks can be tiered from simple to complex to match learner proficiency. The "Outdoor Activities" planning task observed in this study exemplified these principles: groups negotiated future-tense forms while collectively solving a problem, thus rehearsing linguistic structures in a format that closely mirrors genuine

social interaction. This synergy of authenticity and engagement confirms drama's unique contribution to collaborative problem-solving and communicative negotiation.

Together, these findings from in-depth interviews and classroom observations corroborate a substantial body of evidence that drama-based pedagogy enhances both language competence and affective dimensions (Alam & Al-Hawamdeh, 2022; Almutairi & Alfarwan, 2024; Nguyen, 2023; Tosun & Demir, 2024; Ütkür-Güllühan et al., 2023; Vukojević, 2023). Importantly, this study extends prior research by illuminating how primary school EFL teachers themselves perceive and enact drama's benefits in real-world classrooms. Their reflections confirm that drama not only scaffolds authentic linguistic practice but also nurtures learners' confidence, creativity, and collaborative skills, offering a rich understanding of how drama can be tailored to young learners' cognitive, social, and developmental needs.

5.2 Discussion of findings on EFL teachers' perceptions about the challenges of using drama in their English-speaking classes

The challenges of using drama in speaking classes as perceived by the teachers, including student affective barriers, varied proficiency levels, time constraints, teacher skill limitations, and resource shortages, echo and extend findings from prior research (Alam & Al-Hawamdeh, 2022; Chauhan, 2004; Neelands & Goode, 2000; Sæbo, 2009).

Regarding student affective barriers, the teachers consistently reported that learners' anxiety and reluctance to perform in front of peers impede active engagement. This mirrors Sæbo's (2009) observation that drama tasks can founder when students lack the confidence to embrace open-ended interaction. In this study's observations, shy pupils frequently deferred leading roles or spoke only when prompted, requiring extensive emotional scaffolding. Inadequate linguistic or emotional preparation compounds this problem, diverting instructional time toward basic readiness rather than creative exploration.

Besides, constructing drama activities that simultaneously challenge fluent speakers and support novices proved difficult. Echoing Nguyen's (2023) findings on discourse dominance, the teachers described how confident students naturally seize roles, while less proficient peers remain marginalized. This imbalance also aligns with Alam and Al-Hawamdeh's (2022) identification of proficiency disparities as a barrier to equitable participation in the classroom.

In terms of time constraints, drama's demands for explanation, rehearsal, performance, and feedback often exceed standard 40-minute lessons. As affirmed by several studies (Alam & Al-Hawamdeh, 2022; Neelands & Goode, 2000), teachers must invest significant class time to design and execute scaffolded drama sequences. Insufficient instructional time leads many teachers to simplify activities, thereby diluting drama's pedagogical richness.

Additionally, effective drama facilitation requires classroom management expertise, improvisational skill, and on-the-spot language correction. Many teachers, particularly those early in their careers, reported limited training in these domains. Consistent with Neelands and Goode (2000), this lack of confidence prompts reliance on rigid scripts or teacher-led presentations, which constrain authentic dialogue and student agency.

Finally, systemic limitations in Central Vietnam's primary school contexts, ranging from a dearth of props to inadequate performance spaces and materials, hinder drama's

implementation. Alam and Al-Hawamdeh (2022) similarly noted that schools with fewer facilities struggle to sustain engaging drama pedagogy. When resources are scarce, teachers must improvise, often at the expense of lesson quality and student immersion.

6. Conclusion

This study highlights primary school EFL teachers' perceptions about the benefits and challenges of using drama to teach speaking skills. The teachers unanimously reported that drama enhances communicative competence by embedding language in authentic, context-rich interactions, bolsters learner confidence and creative expression through role-play and empathetic immersion and promotes real-world relevance and collaborative engagement by mirroring students' everyday experiences. At the same time, they identified significant obstacles, including student affective barriers, varied proficiency levels, insufficient instructional time, teachers' limited drama facilitation skills, and resource shortages, that constrain drama's effective implementation in 40-minute lessons. By triangulating in-depth semi-structured interviews with classroom observations, this research not only confirms the positive outcomes documented in prior studies but also foregrounds the detailed, context-specific challenges faced by primary school EFL teachers when using drama activities in their speaking classes. This study substantiates earlier research by detailing how affective, pedagogical, and systemic factors jointly constrain drama's integration in primary EFL classrooms. The difficulties encountered by the primary school teachers in this study indicate the necessity for specialized professional development, tailored task design, and adequate resource support to leverage drama's pedagogical advantages. Addressing these challenges will be essential for policymakers, teacher educators, and school leaders seeking to harness drama's full potential to cultivate communicative competence, creativity, and engagement in primary EFL speaking classes.

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