

Development of English Conversation Drama Practice Exercises to Enhance First-Year Students English-Speaking Proficiency

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Abstract

The study examined the impact of English conversation drama practice exercises on the English-speaking proficiency of first-year university students learning English as a foreign language (EFL). Focused on practical and professional conversational skills within the "English for Life and Work" course, the research gathered insights from students in the upper northeastern region of Thailand during the first semester of 2023. Participants were intentionally selected from five cohorts, totaling 500 students enrolled in the course. Data analysis involved percentage analysis, calculating the mean, assessing standard deviation, and continuous testing. The findings revealed that prior to the intervention, the experimental group exhibited a high level of English speaking ability, with an average rating of 3.86. However, only 13.3% of students demonstrated admirable speaking abilities. Following the intervention, an impressive 93.3% of students achieved a 'very good' level of English

speaking proficiency. An extensive assessment of students' speaking skills before and after the experiment showcased a significant improvement, surpassing their initial proficiency levels. These results underscore the effectiveness of English conversation drama practice exercises in substantially enhancing students' English-speaking skills, with statistical significance observed at the .05 level.

Keywords: drama practice exercises, English-speaking proficiency, EFL University students

Introduction

Proficiency in spoken English is a major challenge for students studying English as a foreign language (EFL) in Thailand. The transition to university level education poses challenges, particularly during their transition to university-level education, where English-speaking courses may deviate from their linguistic foundations. The complexities of the English spoken language exacerbate the difficulties faced by Thai students learning English as a foreign language. In order to tackle these factors, it is crucial to conduct a thorough analysis of different elements, such as motivational factors, learning opportunities, existing knowledge, proficient study skills, and the incorporation of engaging learning activities. (Tantiwich & Sinwongsuwat, 2021).

Angwatanakul (1997) emphasized the importance of English as a global language integrated into daily life. Despite concerted efforts to prioritize English language education, the proficiency of Thai students in spoken English remains insufficient. The process of acquiring English as a second language is inherently

challenging, as traditional textbooks dominate classrooms and hinder practical application.

English speaking is a crucial skill for college students, especially those who lack effective strategies for learning spoken communication. The transition to higher education often presents challenges in speaking ability, primarily due to a lack of self-confidence, restricted vocabulary, inadequate language skills for real-life interactions, and a lack of analytical thinking and expressive capabilities (Nurmalasari, Tahir, Korompot, 2023:56). Factors such as speech anxiety, word recall challenges, limited practice with instructors and peers, and aversion to speaking skills courses exacerbate these difficulties (Galante, 2018). To address these challenges, the researcher is introducing English conversation activities within the "English for Life and Work" course. English for Life and Work (GE 44002) serves as a General Education requirement, stipulated at three credits, obligatory for all enrolled students at Udonthani Rajabhat University. Its fundamental objective lies in fostering proficiency across the four core language skills, with particular emphasis directed towards enhancing aptitude in auditory comprehension and oral expression. Therefore, the activity initiatively aims to cultivate practical speaking skills applicable to everyday communication and professional scenarios, fostering a positive and interactive learning environment, as well as aims to enhance students' communicative competencies and foster happiness and motivation among them.

Within the realm of the ESL/EFL classroom, the integration of dramatic elements constitutes a holistic pedagogical approach encompassing diverse activities such as improvisational exercises, enactment of scripted scenarios, and spontaneous performance creation. These modalities serve to immerse students in English language acquisition endeavors by actively engaging their imaginative faculties and

emotive capacities. In the context of GE 44002, the conventional practice of situational dialogue rehearsal in pairs is deemed mundane. Conversely, the formulation and enactment of dramatic narratives emerge as a more engaging and enjoyable instructional strategy. In contrast to role-play, where participants typically assume predetermined roles and interact within specific scenarios, drama incorporates scripted narratives that encompass broader situational contexts. This distinction allows for a more expansive exploration of various linguistic and socio-cultural scenarios, enabling learners to engage with language in multifaceted contexts. Within the educational context of GE 44002, the utilization of scripted dramas offers a platform for students to immerse themselves in diverse linguistic situations, thereby enhancing their language proficiency through the exploration of nuanced language use within realistic contexts.

Communication Theories

The process of language acquisition is complex and requires a holistic approach considering various factors. Communication theories, particularly those centered on communicative competence, underscore the importance of effectively using language in practical contexts, surpassing mere memorization of grammatical rules and vocabulary. This study focuses on cultivating practical speaking skills, aiming to equip students with the ability to engage effectively in verbal communication (Mohamad Nor & Rashid, 2018:8). Understanding the psychological barriers to communication and the interaction between psychological factors and spoken language proficiency is crucial. Incorporating real-life scenarios aligns with constructivist theories, emphasizing the significance of social interaction and authentic contexts in language skill development. Sociocultural perspectives,

influenced by Vygotsky's research, emphasize the role of social interactions, cultural context, and genuine communication experiences in language acquisition. Engaging students in practical situations enhances their understanding of effective spoken language acquisition (Souzandehfar & Ahmed Abdel-Al Ibrahim, 2023). Drama activities have been recognized as beneficial for improving the speaking skills of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, promoting spontaneous speech and fluency, even if occasional language mistakes occur (Bessadet, 2022). Engaging in drama can significantly contribute to EFL learners' ability to communicate effectively in English (Vaishnavi & Ajit, 2023; Bessadet, 2022). In response, the researcher aims to bridge the gap by introducing English conversation activities within the "English for Life and Work" course for EFL first-year students, focusing on practical speaking skills for everyday communication and work scenarios. The initiative seeks to enhance students' communicative abilities in real-world contexts, ultimately contributing to the development of adept graduates with strong communication skills. The design of conversation drama exercises aims to simulate real-life situations where English is commonly used, ensuring practical application of English skills.

Research Objectives

- 1) To investigate the impact of English conversation drama practice exercises on the development of English-speaking proficiency among Thai EFL first-year students in the "English for Life and Work" course
- 2) To investigate the students' attitudes toward practicing English conversations through drama exercises

Research Methodology

1. Population and Samples Used in the Research

The study involved 1,800 first-year students enrolled in the "English for Life and Work" course at Udonthani Rajabhat University. The sample size, comprising 100 students, was determined through rigorous statistical analysis and precedent studies. The sample size, representing approximately 5.6% of the total population, was chosen deliberately to yield meaningful insights. Purposive random sampling technique ensured diverse student characteristics and experiences, enhancing the generalizability of the findings. The study's representativeness was assessed based on demographic information and academic backgrounds.

This study utilizes a quasi-experimental design, incorporating a pre-test and post-test, to examine the efficacy of drama-based methods in enhancing spoken language for communication abilities among first-year EFL students.

2. Data Collection

Phrase 1: The development of English Conversation Drama Practice Exercises for enhancing speaking achievement in the English for Life and Work course for EFL students involves the following steps:

The process of developing English Conversation Drama Practice Exercises to enhance speaking achievement in the "English for Life and Work" course for EFL students involves several key steps. Firstly, the researchers conducted an extensive literature review on language acquisition, drama-based teaching methods, and English language proficiency development, identifying gaps and opportunities for integrating drama exercises into English language courses. Secondly, the current English-speaking proficiency levels of first-year students enrolled in the course were

assessed, pinpointing specific areas for improvement and challenges in their speaking abilities. Thirdly, collaboration with language experts and educators led to the design of a series of tailored English conversation drama practice exercises aligned with the course curriculum, focusing on practical conversations in various life and work scenarios. Fourthly, pilot testing was conducted by administering the developed exercises to a limited number of students outside the sample group to gather feedback on efficacy, engagement, and practicality. Based on this feedback, adjustments were made to the exercises. Additionally, specialists conducted a thorough analysis of the lesson plans to ensure a strong correlation between the questions and the study objectives, as measured by the Index of Item-Objective Congruence (IOC). These steps collectively ensured the systematic development and refinement of the English Conversation Drama Practice Exercises to effectively enhance students' speaking achievement in the targeted course.

The test conducted to evaluate the English Conversation Drama Practice Exercise demonstrated strong validity, as indicated by Index of Item-Objective Congruence (IOC) scores ranging from 0.60 to 1.00, allowing retention of 83 out of the 100 items. The difficulty (P) values ranged from 0.2 to 0.8, while discrimination (R) values were consistently 0.2 or higher, ensuring the test's reliability. Ultimately, 40 questions closely aligned with the objectives and maintained consistency, forming the basis of the test comprising multiple-choice questions totaling 40 items and 40 points, with an IOC ranging between 0.67 and 1.00, affirming coherence. The questions demonstrated varying difficulty levels (P) within the range of 0.20 to 0.79, with effective discrimination abilities spanning 0.37 to 0.93. Importantly, the test displayed a commendable reliability coefficient of 0.82, instilling confidence in its outcomes.

The conversation exercise was implemented with a non-sample group selected through cluster random sampling, comprising EFL students from the first semester of the academic year 2022. Individual performance assessments, conducted through one-on-one tryouts involving three participants, ensured a systematic and unbiased selection process for evaluating the exercise's impact. The effectiveness of the learning management plan was assessed using the ratio $E1/E2$, yielding a measure of $81.02/80.56$, which further validated its efficacy. In the second semester of the academic year 2022, a Small Group Tryout involving 10 participants resulted in an efficiency ratio of $82.14/81.83$. Subsequently, a field performance assessment during the same semester, incorporating 30 students, observed an efficiency ratio of $E1/E2 = 82.86/81.72$. These findings collectively affirm that the researcher-developed learning plan consistently meets the predefined effectiveness criterion of $80/80$.

Phrase 2: Pre-test and Post-test

1) Participant Selection involves the careful curation of a representative sample comprising first-year students enrolled in the "English for Life and Work" course. This selection process aims to ensure the inclusivity and diversity of the participants. Two distinct groups are formed: one for the pretest assessment and another for the posttest evaluation.

2) Pre-Test: In assessing speaking proficiency, the utilization of multiple-choice questions serves as the preferred test format due to its capacity to facilitate concurrent evaluation of a substantial cohort of students. This format affords a standardized framework, thereby mitigating examiner bias and ensuring equitable appraisal across heterogeneous student demographics. Administer a pre-test to assess their initial English-speaking proficiency levels. This establishes a baseline for comparison.

3) Implementation: Introduce the English conversation drama practice exercises. In GE 44002, each drama exercise is crafted to reflect fundamental English language competencies pertinent to daily life scenarios. Each drama exercise is supplemented with relevant vocabulary, language structures, and cultural nuances to enhance learners' linguistic proficiency and cultural competence. In this comprehensive drama exercise, participants are immersed in a series of real-life scenarios, spanning from everyday interactions to critical situations; greetings and introductions, simulated shopping experiences, travel adventures, job interview simulations, telephone conversations. By combining all six topics into one drama exercise and allowing students to rewrite the script in their own style, each group will produce a unique and personalized performance, showcasing their creativity and language proficiency over the course of six weeks.

4) Post-Test: After the completion of the exercises, administer a post-test to evaluate their English-speaking proficiency levels. Compare the results with the pre-test to measure the impact of the drama exercises.

Phrase 3: Investigate Students' Attitudes

1) Survey Design: 1) Survey Design: The attitude survey was created and assessed based on specific criteria. Subsequently, the survey underwent scrutiny by specialists to guarantee its coherence and structure. Upon thorough examination of the survey design, a favorable consistency coefficient of 0.90 was attained. After analyzing the scores, it was determined that the survey items had a high level of internal consistency, as evidenced by a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.83. This confirms the reliability of the survey.

2) Following the completion of the development process, the attitude survey was conducted. The survey had to be conducted in accordance with the plan to guarantee uniformity and precision. Data was gathered in a methodical and uniform manner in order to enhance the reliability and validity of the attitude survey.

3. Data Analysis and Statistics

The acquired data underwent a thorough analysis employing various data analysis and statistical techniques to derive significant insights. Firstly, the drama conversation was enriched, and a learning management plan was devised by conducting content analysis on information from the CEFR A2-B1 textbook for English learners. This involved meticulously analyzing the textbook content to extract relevant material for crafting drama exercises and formulating an effective learning strategy. Secondly, the efficacy of the research instruments was evaluated through several steps: verifying the overall quality and validity of the test by ensuring alignment with intended content and skills, experts' assessment using Likert's 5-level scale to ensure accuracy in measuring study objectives, evaluating test difficulty (p) and discrimination ability (r), assessing overall confidence in test results, and determining test consistency and reliability using the Kuder-Richardson Formula 20 (KR-20). Thirdly, the effectiveness of the learning package was gauged against a criterion of 80/80, necessitating both process (E1) and outcome (E2) evaluation scores to surpass 80. Fourthly, collected data was summarized and presented using descriptive statistics such as means, standard deviations, and frequencies. Additionally, a paired-sample t-test was conducted to compare pre-test and post-test scores, aiming to identify statistically significant differences in students' language proficiency before and after the introduction of drama exercises. Lastly, students'

perspectives on learning were evaluated using a 5-level Likert scale assessment to gauge their satisfaction and perception of the implemented strategies. Overall, these comprehensive analyses provided valuable insights into the efficacy and impact of the drama-based learning approach on enhancing English language proficiency among EFL students.

Results

1. Research objective 1: To investigate the impact of English conversation drama practice exercises on the development of English-speaking proficiency among first-year students in the "English for Life and Work" course.

The comparison between the pre-test and post-test scores revealed a significant improvement in English-speaking proficiency among the first-year students enrolled in the "English for Life and Work" course. The post-test scores were notably higher than the pre-test scores, indicating substantial progress in the participants' language skills. The efficacy analysis of the English conversations through drama exercises in enhancing speaking achievements in the English for Life and Work (GE 44002) course for undergraduate students at is shown in Table 2.

The implementation of English conversation drama practice exercises in the "English for Life and Work" course proved effective in enhancing first-year students' English-speaking proficiency. The exercises fostered a dynamic and interactive learning environment that facilitated practical language use and boosted students' confidence in engaging in English conversations.

Table 1

Results of the Efficacy Analysis of the English Conversations through Drama Exercises in Enhancing Speaking Achievements in the English for Life and Work (GE 44002) course for EFL students.

Exercise	Contents	E₁	E₂
1	Drama Exercise 1	81.33	81.58
2	Drama Exercise 2	80.13	80.36
3	Drama Exercise 3	82.31	82.80
4	Drama Exercise 4	82.03	82.25
5	Drama Exercise 5	86.40	86.69
6	Drama Exercise 6	84.34	84.63
Total average of 6 Exercises		82.76	83.05

Table 1 reveals the effectiveness of the English conversation drama practice exercises on the development of English-speaking proficiency among EFL first-year students in the "English for Life and Work" course. The English conversation drama practice exercises achieved an efficiency value of 82.76 for process evaluation (E₁) and 83.05 for outcome evaluation (E₂). The dataset indicated that E₁ and E₂ are quite similar, with E₂ scores being slightly higher on average. These values align with the established 80/80 criterion, signifying that the designed exercises effectively facilitate learning management within the sample group. The comparative results of learning achievement using English conversation drama practice exercises to enhance English-speaking proficiency among EFL first-year students are depicted for both pre-test and post-test. The findings are the comparative results of learning

achievement using English conversation drama practice exercises to enhance English-speaking proficiency among EFL first-year students are depicted for both pre-test and post-test periods. The findings are illustrated in Table 2.

Table 2

Illustrated Pre-Test and Post-Test cores

Test	N	full score	Mean	S.D.	t
Pre-test	100	40	15.52	4.10	28.04
Post-test	100	40	27.95	1.68	

*Level of statistical significance at the .05 level.

The comparative outcomes of learning achievement using English conversation drama practice exercises to enhance English-speaking proficiency among EFL first-year students are presented for both pre-test and post-test evaluations. The analysis revealed that the learners' achievement scores post-learning were significantly higher than their scores prior to learning, the level of statistical significance is extremely high ($p < 0.001$), indicating a highly significant difference between the means of the posttest and pretest.

3.2 Research objective 2: to investigate the students' attitudes toward practicing English conversations through drama exercises.

The investigation into students' attitudes toward practicing English conversations through drama exercises revealed positive outcomes. Students

exhibited a favorable disposition towards this pedagogical approach, showcasing an encouraging level of enthusiasm and engagement in the process.

Table 3

Students' Attitudes Towards Engaging in English Conversations through Drama Exercises.

Items	Levels		
	\bar{x}	S.D.	interpret
I find practicing English conversations through drama exercises enjoyable.	4.46	0.50	Agree
Engaging in drama exercises helps me feel more confident in my English-speaking abilities.	4.5	0.51	Strongly Agree
Drama exercises make learning English conversations more interesting compared to traditional methods.	4.46	0.50	Agree
I believe that drama exercises are effective in improving my English-speaking skills.	4.6	0.49	Strongly Agree
I am motivated to participate in English conversation drama exercises to enhance my language proficiency.	4.56	0.50	Strongly Agree
I feel that drama exercises help me better understand real-life situations where English is used.	4.54	0.50	Strongly Agree

Table 3 (Con.)

Items	Levels		
	\bar{x}	S.D.	interpret
I appreciate the opportunity to express myself through role-playing and acting in English.	4.52	0.50	Strongly Agree
I believe that practicing English conversations through drama exercises prepares me for effective communication in various contexts.	4.82	0.39	Strongly Agree
Drama exercises make learning English conversations feel less intimidating and more interactive.	4.48	0.50	Agree
I think that drama exercises contribute to a positive classroom environment and encourage active participation.	4.24	0.43	Agree
Totally	4.52	0.04	Strongly Agree

Table 3 presented the outcomes of the participants' opinions regarding the English conversations through drama exercises in enhancing speaking achievements in English for Life and Work (GE 44002) course for EFL students. The overall assessment reached the highest level, with a mean of 4.52 and a standard deviation of

0.04 across all items. Among the items, being engaging and interesting scored the highest mean of 4.82, with a standard deviation of 0.39.

Discussions

1. The notable increase in students' language achievement attributed to the utilization of English conversation drama practice exercises can be attributed to several key factors, underscoring the meticulous design and validation of research tools. Firstly, the careful design of research tools played a pivotal role in enhancing language achievement. These tools were intricately crafted to align precisely with research objectives and accurately measure the targeted constructs. Through an exhaustive review of pertinent literature, items and questions within the research tools were conceptualized to be conceptually grounded and directly relevant to the study's focal points. Such meticulous design ensured that the tools effectively captured the specific language constructs under investigation (Housen et al., 2018).

Furthermore, the validation process significantly contributed to enhancing students' language achievement. Experts in the field of language education and assessment rigorously scrutinized the research tools, assessing aspects such as clarity, relevance, and appropriateness of items. Their invaluable insights and critiques ensured that the tools were valid and aptly measured the intended constructs, thereby bolstering the credibility of the research findings (Robinson, 2007).

Additionally, conducting a pilot study with a small sample of participants served as a crucial step in refining the research tools. This preliminary investigation aimed to gauge the comprehensibility and efficacy of the tools, identifying any necessary modifications to enhance user-friendliness and precision. By improving face validity, the pilot study confirmed the accurate measurement of intended

language constructs, ensuring accessibility and understanding among the target population.

Drawing on related research, such as the work of Tremblay (2011), further enriched the study's effectiveness in enhancing language achievement. Tremblay's research on developing teaching materials and instructional kits for diverse domains provided valuable insights into successful teaching methods and materials applicable in various contexts. Integrating cross-disciplinary knowledge contributed to the efficacy of language achievement strategies embedded within the drama exercises, thus augmenting students' overall language proficiency.

2. The outcome of students' attitudes toward engaging in English conversations through drama exercises demonstrates a notably high level of positivity, attributable to various factors within the instructional approach and learning process. One significant contributor to these favorable attitudes is the interactive and dynamic nature of drama exercises. Engaging in role-playing and creating communication scenarios offers students a refreshing and immersive platform to practice English conversational skills. Unlike traditional methods that can be static and passive, drama exercises actively involve students in real-life language usage, making language learning more engaging and enjoyable. Additionally, the active involvement of students in shaping and developing the script within their groups fosters a sense of ownership over the content, storyline, and interactions. This participatory approach empowers students, enhancing their motivation and enthusiasm for language practice.

Moreover, drama exercises address common apprehensions associated with traditional language learning methods, such as anxiety about using a new language in real-life situations. By providing a supportive and safe environment for applying

English in authentic contexts, drama exercises help reduce anxiety and encourage students to express themselves more freely. This bridge between classroom learning and real-world language use facilitates a smoother transition and diminishes intimidation. Research conducted by Bora (2020); Galante and Thomson (2016); and Gill (2013) supports the notion that the engaging, interactive, and learner-centered nature of drama exercises contributes to this positive response. When students are actively engaged and have the opportunity to shape their learning experiences, they tend to exhibit more enthusiasm and motivation for language learning. Thus, drama exercises align with contemporary teaching methods that prioritize learner engagement and participation.

Recommendations

1. suggestions for applying the research findings

1.1 Based on this research, teachers should define clear learning objectives that align with language proficiency goals because English language learning is the main goal. Clearly communicate these objectives to students so they understand the purpose.

1.2 The teacher should prepare the complexity of drama exercises to match the proficiency levels of your students. Consider their linguistic abilities, age, cultural backgrounds, and prior exposure to drama activities.

Suggestions for the further research

2.1 Investigate the sustainability of the skills acquired through drama exercises over an extended period. Study the long-term impact of the benefits of enhanced language proficiency and positive attitudes.

2.2 Expand the scope of the investigation to explore how drama exercises impact not only language proficiency but also other aspects of language learning, such as intercultural communication skills.

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