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English department students' attitudes towards using drama-based role-plays in speaking classes

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Abstract
This article is aimed to investigate the attitudes of students toward using drama-based role-plays in speaking classes at the English Department of Language and Literature faculty of Herat University, Afghanistan. The main purpose of this study was to find out the effectiveness of drama-based role-plays on students' speaking ability and self-confidence. The design of the study was quantitative. The data were collected through a questionnaire. The participants of the study were 60 sophomore students. The results of the study showed that students have a positive attitude towards using drama-based role-plays in speaking courses. The findings also indicated that the friendly atmosphere created as a result of practicing drama-based role plays in the classroom encourages shy students to overcome their nervousness, build self-confidence, and develop their speaking skills. The article concluded with research limitations and pedagogical implications.

Keywords: Drama-based role-plays, self-confidence, speaking skills

Introduction

English is required to be taught as a foreign language in all educational institutions of Afghanistan as it is vital in global communication. One of the most important skills through which people communicate and carry their messages and thoughts globally is English speaking skill. To improve learners' speaking skills, teachers can use different methods and techniques in the classroom. Drama-based role-playing techniques can be very effective if teachers implement them in the classroom. Drama has been defined as a classroom activity in which the learners are engaged in practicing the target language in a certain situation or a task in a communicative way (Mok, 2012; Sirisrimangkorn and Suwanthep, 2013) [8, 12]. And Qing (2011) [9] defined role play "as the projection in real-life situations with social activities" (p. 37). Moreover, role play is considered as one of the communicative-based activities which permit students to practice the target language and cooperate with other students to improve their speaking skills (Revathy & Ravindran, 2016) [11].

Many Afghan students have some problems in productive skills rather than receptive skills. Speaking is one of those productive skills in which Afghan students are reluctant to produce the target language. The problems relate to students' lack of confidence, interest, and information. Learners are also anxious when they are asked to speak in English (Fung & Min, 2016) [3]. Many Afghan students are afraid of making mistakes when expressing their ideas. Thus, they tend to be quiet. It is the instructor's responsibility to stimulate his/her students to speak by preparing a friendly atmosphere inside the classroom. According to Harmer (2007) [5], the reason why teachers should get students to speak in the classroom is closely related to practice real-life speaking. This is because the main goal of speaking classes is to provide a situation in which students speak freely and fluently. Since the language classroom is the only chance for Afghan students to practice the English language, teachers should prepare the environment for the students to practice the target language however students face with some challenges such as problems with pronunciation, fluency, vocabulary, and grammar, as well as having nervousness, hesitation, and fear of making mistakes.

This study is important in identifying drama-based role-plays as one of the best methods in improving communication skills such as speaking skills. This is because during drama-based role-playing activities, the classroom atmosphere is very relaxing and friendly, and it makes students more active. According to Ayuningtias et al. (2019) [1], students have the chance to reflect on their personal experiences while performing the role-plays. They added that "…role play is not only used for interactive teaching in the classroom but also to stimulate

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students in real-life situations" (p. 417). Moreover, the drama-based role-playing activities offer the opportunity for learners to cultivate new knowledge and rise different viewpoints since they are required to play different roles. It is hoped that the findings of the present study could help the EFL teachers to come to a better understanding of using the drama-based role-play in speaking classes. This is a very helpful and important process to make students active and enhance their ability to use the target language while playing their roles in comfortable circumstances. Besides, through the use of drama-based role-playing activities, students can be engaged and motivated to use the English language and overcome their anxiety since they are exposed in a friendly environment.

The purpose of this quantitative study is to investigate the attitudes of Afghan students toward drama-based role-plays in speaking classes of the English Department at Herat University. Also, the study aims to find out the effects of drama-based role-plays on students' speaking ability and self-confidence.

This study hypothesizes that if teachers expose their students to contextualized speech such as drama-based role-playing activities, they can improve their students' oral performance and build their self-confidence.

Research Questions
To reiterate, this study aims to investigate the following research questions:

- What are Afghan learners' attitudes toward using drama-based role-plays in speaking classes?
- Do drama-based role-plays enhance Afghan learners' self-confidence?
- Do drama-based role-plays develop Afghan learners' oral proficiency?

Literature Review
Prior studies on the effect of drama- based role play on speaking skills
A study conducted in 2018 by Rahman and Maarof in Malaysia to investigate the impact of role-playing and simulation approach on students' ESL oral communication skills. The study also inspected the learners' acuities toward the impact of the role-play and simulation approach on their oral performances. They used a mixed-method design of both quantitative and qualitative data gathering from 100 participants. They used questionnaires, a pre and post-test to collect their quantitative data. The results of their study indicated a big difference between the scores of the pre-test and post-test of the two groups: the traditional group and the role-play and simulation group. The results showed that learners in the role- play and simulation group showed better performances in the post-test than in the pre-test.

Similarly, Nhi & Huan (2017) [7] carried out a study at a Vietnamese university in the Mekong Delta to find out students' attitudes towards the use and effect of drama-based role-playing activities in EFL speaking courses. The focus of this article was on three domains: 1) speaking performance–accuracy, 2) pronunciation, and 3) EFL interactive communication. The participants of their study were 30 freshmen who were divided into two groups: A control and an experimental group. They used a mixed-method design. They collected the data through pre-test and post-test for the experimental part of their study and interviews for the qualitative part. The findings of the

quantitative data showed that the speaking skills of the students in the experimental group improved however there was no progress in the oral performance of students in the control group. Particularly, there was a significant change in interactive communication, accuracy in speaking and, pronunciation within the experimental group. Moreover, the results of the qualitative data indicated positive attitudes of the learners towards drama-based role-playing activities.

Besides, Sirisrimangkorn and Suwanthep (2013) [12] researched in a northeastern university in Thailand. The purpose of their study was to find out the effects of drama-based role play and Student Teams Achievement Division (STAD) on the freshman students' speaking skills, stimulus, and self-confidence. The study was designed both quantitatively and qualitatively. There were 80 undergraduate non-English major students involved in this study separated into one experimental and one control group. The study was conducted into one semester of the academic year. The content of the study was similar for both groups but drama-based role play and STAD, with blended-learning instruction, were only introduced and applied for the experimental group. The finding illustrated the efficacy of drama-based role play blended with STAD on learners' oral proficiency, stimulus, and self-confidence in the experimental group. The study implied the integration of drama-based and cooperative learning to develop students' English speaking skills.

In another study, Sirisrimangkorn (2018) [13] examined project-based learning focusing on drama to improve EFL learners' speaking skills. The purpose of the study was to investigate how the use of project-based learning focusing on drama is helpful to students' speaking skills. The research had a mixed-method design. The results indicated that students' speaking skills were enhanced through the use of project-based learning focusing on drama. The finding also underlined the benefits of using project-based learning focusing on drama as an operative teaching method since it provides an enjoyable atmosphere for students to learn and produce the English language.

Moreover, in action research, Ayuningtias et al. (2019) [1] studied the use of role play technique to improve students' speaking skill. The research aimed to develop speaking skills through the use of role-play techniques. The research type was classroom action research which involved 30 students in the academic years of 2017-2018. The researchers collected the data from tests and observations. The findings indicated students' improvement in speaking skills after the role-play activities were applied in the classroom.

A further study was done by Iamsaard and Kerdpol (2015) [6] in Thailand to study the effect of dramatic activities on improving English communicative skills. The purpose of the study was to investigate students' perspectives towards the use of dramatic activities in their speaking classes. The subjects of the study were 11th-grade students. The researchers did their experiment in 21 hours within 7 weeks. Lesson plans consisting of dramatic activities, a test of English communicative speaking and a questionnaire were the research instruments. The results showed students' positive attitudes toward using dramatic activities in speaking classes after they attended the teaching class in which the dramatic activities were implemented.

Even though researchers have conducted many studies on the attitudes of students towards using drama-based role-

plays in speaking classes, still few studies have been done on this topic in the Afghan context. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the attitudes of Afghan students toward drama-based role-play in speaking classes and find out its effects on students' speaking ability and self- esteem.

Research Methodology
This study is designed to study the effects of drama-based role-play activities on developing speaking ability of sophomore students of the English Department at Herat University. This chapter overall describes the research design, participants, instruments, analysis of questionnaire, and data analysis methods.

Research Design
In order to study the effectiveness of the drama-based role play activities on developing speaking skills of sophomore students, this study aims to use quantitative design. According to Creswell & Clark (2017) [2], it is the method which collects, analyzes data qualitatively to gain a more deep understanding of the problem. Since quantitative study relies on numerical data, there is a higher possibility of objectivity and accuracy of the results of the study. Furthermore, quantitative research provides reliable results. In this design, data will be collected through questionnaires.

Participants
Participants of the study are the sophomore students of the English Department of Herat University. A total of 60 students, both male and female, participated in the study. Sophomore students are selected to be the participants of study because they have already had three listening-speaking semesters; thus, their input regarding the effectiveness of the drama-based role play activities in speaking classes can provide valuable insight in employing role plays in speaking classes.

Instruments
To find out the effectiveness of the drama-based role play activities, the researchers have opted for using questionnaire as the instrument of the study. The questionnaire of the study consists of 20 items. Students are given a range of options – Strongly agree (5), Agree (4), Neutral (3), Disagree (2), and Strongly Disagree (1) – to select from in order to express their experience of using drama-based role play activities in speaking classes.

Analysis of Questionnaire
The items in the questionnaire are designed to find out the attitude of the sophomore students towards drama-based role plays in speaking classes. Questionnaire is a comprehensively used tool for collecting survey data. It provides structured and numerical data. The items in the questionnaire are multiple-choice statements. Descriptive analysis comprises frequency, percentage, mean, mode and median. Since the questionnaire of this study is Likert-type, the data will be analyzed with mode, median, frequency, and percentage using SPSS software.

Results
This study was conducted to find out the attitude of Afghan sophomore students in the English Department at Herat University towards drama-based role plays on the development of their speaking skills. Students were given a questionnaire to record their attitude towards implementing role-plays in speaking classrooms.

The researcher was interested to find out students' attitude (n=60) towards drama-based role-plays in speaking classes; therefore, they were given a questionnaire of 20 items (k=20) to gather data. The items in the questionnaire were divided into three categories. The following Table 3.1 provides descriptive statistics for the data depicting the difficulty level of role-plays in speaking classrooms:

Table 1: Difficulty level of drama-based role-plays

Items	M	Max	Min	SD	Skew	Kurt
It is difficult to play a role in the classroom.	3.95	5	1	1.19	-1.17	0.61
It is difficult to select a topic for role play.	3.85	5	0	1.38	-1.09	0.19
It is difficult to fully express the role in a limited time.	3.87	5	1	1.14	-1.21	1.11

The mean score for the difficulty level of the drama-based role-plays fall between 3.87-3.95. The minimum score ranges from 0 to 1 and the maximum is 5.

The second category of the questionnaire focuses on how drama-based role-plays develop language skills of the language learners. The following Table 3.2 provides details of the descriptive statistics of the category:

Table 2: Drama-based role-plays developing language skills

Items	M	Max	Min	SD	Skew	Kurt
Drama-based role plays help students develop their speaking ability.	4.17	5	1	0.85	-1.54	3.42
Drama-based role plays help students increase accuracy.	4.17	5	1	0.99	-1.52	2.35
Drama based role-plays help students improve and enrich their vocabulary	3.73	5	1	1.27	-0.9	-0.3
Drama based role-plays give an opportunity for students to practice and test their language skills	3.73	5	0	1.19	-108	0.99
A drama-based role play is a practice that develops communication skills.	4.27	5	1	0.69	-1.7	7.48
The feedback students receive after drama-based role plays help them improve their fluency skills.	4.1	5	0	0.97	-2.06	6.02

The scores for the items focusing on the development of language skills because of drama-based role-plays ranges from 3.73 to 4.17. The third category Table 3.3 focuses on the effects of drama-based role-plays on the performance of language learners.

Table 3: Effects of drama-based role-plays on students' performance

Items	M	Max	Min	SD	Skew	Kurt
Drama-based role-playing activities are interesting and enjoyable.	3.8	5	1	1.12	-0.81	0.14
Drama-based role plays are completely different from other activities.	3.9	5	1	1.1	-1.06	0.68
Drama-based role plays help students overcome nervousness and shyness.	4.17	5	0	0.96	-2.25	6.99
Doing drama-based role plays in groups helps students share ideas.	3.82	5	1	1.08	-1.04	0.66
Drama-based role plays provide an opportunity to express emotions freely.	3.98	5	0	1.08	-2.13	5.55
Having drama-based role-plays enhances students' self-confidence.	4.33	5	1	0.86	-2.05	5.97
Drama based role-plays increase students' motivation and interest.	4.33	5	0	1.04	-2.42	6.87
Assigning a group of students to have a drama-based performance in front of an audience builds sense of collaboration among the groups.	4.27	5	1	0.78	-1.63	4.77
When performing role-plays in the class, the teacher should select the role for each student.	4.08	5	1	0.96	-1.35	2.18
Having many role-playing activities in the classroom makes the class atmosphere very friendly and this is good for learning.	4.15	5	1	0.84	-136	2.9
Drama-based role-plays make students very creative	3.93	5	1	0.92	-0.82	0.72

The average score on the items related to students' performance ranges between 3.8 to 4, the maximum score for all the items were 5 and the minimum for most of the items were 1. The values for most of the items were negatively skewed; however, the Kurtosis values indicate that there are fewer outliers in the data obtained from questionnaire.

The researchers were further interested to find out the reliability of the questionnaire. KR-21 was used to estimate the reliability of the questionnaire. The KR-21 statistic was $r = 0.89$, indicating high reliability for the given questionnaire.

Discussion and Conclusion
Drama-based role-pays is a tool that has been widely utilized in speaking classrooms. According to Galante and Thomson (2017) [4] role plays require more "imagination" on the part of the student to be able to get "into" the role. For an efficient role-play/simulation teacher's intrusion should be kept to a minimum to give students a chance to test their learnt language in a safe environment. The results of the study show that students have a positive attitude towards using drama-based role-plays. The results of the three categories were all negatively skewed which means that more values are concentrated on the right side of the tail; therefore, it can be understood that most of the students believed that drama-based role plays are helpful in speaking classrooms.

The first category as shown in the results sections, discusses the level of the difficulty of drama-based role plays. As it can be seen in Table 3.1, the results of the study show mean values range between 3 to 4; thus, depicting a moderate level of difficulty in conducting drama-based role plays in speaking classes.

The second category discusses the effects of drama-based role plays on language development. Results of the study show (Table 3.2) that students believe drama-based role plays positively affect their overall language development. It helps in improving fluency, accuracy, vocabulary knowledge, and it provides students with an opportunity to assess their language skills via feedback they receive from the instructor and their peers. However, it should be noted that the teacher's input should be thus left for the post-activity feedback session (Galante & Thomson, 2017) [4]. Values in the second category are also concentrated in the right side which conveys a positive attitude of the students towards drama-based role plays in speaking classes.

The third category discusses a wider range of students' performance in speaking classes that are affected by drama-based role plays. Results suggest that most of the students believe that drama-based role plays are vital to foster collaboration among students (mean=4.27), develop interest and motivation (mean=4.33), and boost self-confidence (mean=4.33) among students. According to Ments (1999) [14] role plays are motivational and effective because they involve activity. Furthermore, Woodhouse (2007) [15] believes role plays helps in developing cultural competence, confidence, and self-efficacy among language learners. It further helps shy students to enhance their language skills via role-plays in groups. Group work nature of drama-based role plays do not put shy students in spot which results in active participation from all the students in the class. On the other hand, the friendly atmosphere created as a result of practicing drama-based role plays in the classroom encourages shy students to overcome their nervousness and stage fright.

Limitations
This research was only limited to one context and one classroom; moreover, this research was limited to 60 upper-intermediate students. It would be interesting to see if drama-based role-plays are favored by students of other levels or not. If there were a control group and a treatment group to compare the results of the groups after the treatment, the results of the study would have been much more comprehensive.

Pedagogical Implications
Drama-based role plays not only improved their overall language skills such as speaking skills, vocabulary knowledge, fluency, and accuracy, it also helped in improving their overall language performance i.e. boosted their self-confidence, increased their motivation, made them creative, and created a friendly atmosphere in the class. Therefore, it can be inferred that drama-based role plays is a necessary tool in developing speaking abilities of language learners; moreover, the positive attitude of students towards the drama-based role plays in speaking classes also suggest that with creativity and adjustments it can be utilized across all the other language skills as well.

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