

APPLIED DRAMA TECHNIQUES FOR IMPROVING SPEAKING AND LISTENING SKILLS

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Abstract: *This study explores the application of applied drama techniques as an innovative pedagogical approach to enhance speaking and listening skills among language learners. As communicative competence becomes increasingly important in both academic and professional contexts, traditional language teaching methods often fall short in engaging students and fostering real-time, interactive communication. Applied drama, which incorporates elements such as role-play, improvisation, storytelling, and forum theatre, offers a dynamic and experiential learning environment that promotes active participation and authentic language use. The research investigates how drama-based activities contribute to the development of verbal expression, active listening, and empathy among learners by simulating real-life scenarios that require spontaneous and meaningful dialogue. Through qualitative and quantitative analysis, the study assesses the impact of these techniques on learners' confidence, fluency, pronunciation, comprehension, and ability to respond appropriately in various communicative settings. Findings indicate that students engaged in applied drama sessions demonstrated notable improvements in both speaking and listening skills. The interactive nature of drama encouraged risk-taking and reduced anxiety, which are critical factors in language acquisition. Furthermore, the emphasis on collaboration and reflection within drama activities enhanced learners' ability to listen attentively and interpret messages accurately. This study concludes that applied drama can serve as a powerful tool in language education, offering a learner-centered, immersive experience that bridges the gap between linguistic theory and practical communication.*

Kata kunci: *Applied Drama, Language Learning, Learner-centered Approach, Listening Skills*

Pendahuluan

Language learning has long been seen as a complex and challenging process, particularly in the case of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). In Indonesia, like in many other countries, learners often face difficulties in acquiring both productive skills (*speaking and writing*) and receptive skills (*listening and reading*). Among these, speaking and listening are crucial, yet they remain the most difficult skills to master. This challenge arises from a number of factors, including traditional teaching methods, lack of real-life communicative opportunities, and the psychological barriers that language learners face, such as anxiety and low self-confidence. The shift from traditional teacher-centered methods to more communicative, learner-centered approaches has been widely advocated in recent decades. The Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach, for instance, emphasizes interaction and the practical use of language in real-life contexts, aiming to prepare students for meaningful communication. One powerful and engaging method within this learner-centered paradigm is applied drama. Applied drama techniques such as role-play, improvisation, and process drama—are increasingly being recognized as effective tools for enhancing speaking and listening skills in language classrooms. Applied drama offers an experiential, interactive, and creative approach to language learning that helps bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical language use. By stepping into various roles and scenarios, learners can overcome the limitations imposed by traditional methods, particularly the lack of opportunities to practice real conversations.

Theoretical Review

A. What is Applied Drama?

Applied drama is the use of theatrical practices in non-theatrical settings, such as education, to achieve learning outcomes. It includes methods like process drama, forum theatre, and role-play. Astutik (2022) showed how drama in EFL classrooms in Indonesia helped students express ideas confidently and practice communication more authentically. Applied drama refers to the use of theatrical techniques in non-theatrical settings for educational, therapeutic, or social purposes (Nicholson, 2005). In the context of language education, applied drama provides a dynamic learning environment where students engage with the language through action, imagination, and interaction. Unlike traditional drama for performance, applied drama focuses on process over product, prioritizing student experience and learning outcomes over artistic perfection.

B. Gardner's Multiple Intelligences

Howard Gardner (1983) proposed that intelligence is not a single, fixed attribute, but consists of multiple modalities such as linguistic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and bodily-kinesthetic intelligences. Applied drama activates several of these intelligences simultaneously, making learning more inclusive and engaging. For example, bodily-kinesthetic learners benefit from physical expression in drama, while interpersonal learners thrive in collaborative scenes and discussions.

C. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) emphasizes the functional use of language in real-world contexts. Instead of focusing solely on grammar and vocabulary, CLT encourages meaningful communication and student interaction. Applied drama complements this approach by providing simulated real-life contexts for students to use language authentically. Role-plays, dialogues, and dramatic scenarios allow students to practice spontaneous speech and listening in emotionally engaging settings.

D. Listening and Speaking in Language Learning

Listening and speaking are core components of communicative competence. Antoro & Pantow (2019) argue that traditional methods of teaching listening often lack real-world relevance and fail to motivate students. Applied drama creates a context-rich environment where listening is purposeful and speaking is contextualized. Students must listen actively to respond appropriately in role-play scenarios, which promotes deep processing and real-time language use.

E. Learner-Centered Approach

The learner-centered approach shifts the focus of teaching from the instructor to the learner. According to Hidayatullah Yunus (2018), this model enhances engagement, autonomy, and critical thinking in the learning process. Applied drama fits naturally within this framework, as it positions students as active participants, co-creators of content, and reflective communicators. It also accommodates diverse learning styles and empowers students to take ownership of their language development.

Research Methodology

A. Design, Participants, Collection Data Technique Research

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design aimed at exploring how applied drama techniques can enhance students' speaking and listening skills in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) settings. The qualitative approach was chosen to provide an in-depth

understanding of learners' experiences, classroom dynamics, and the pedagogical strategies employed by teachers. This design also allowed the researcher to interpret social interactions and language use within applied drama activities. The participants consisted of English teachers and students from three junior high schools in Indonesia that had integrated applied drama into their English curriculum. A total of 6 teachers and 90 students (grades 7–9) participated in this study. The selection of participants used purposive sampling, focusing on schools where drama-based instruction was already being practiced. Data were collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. Classroom observations were conducted to document how applied drama techniques were used in teaching and how students interacted during the activities. Interviews were held with both teachers and students to gain insight into their perceptions and experiences related to the drama-based lessons. Documents, such as lesson plans and student reflective journals, were analyzed to examine how drama was integrated and its effects on students' language development.

B. Data Source

In this study, the data were derived from two main sources: primary data and secondary data. Each plays a critical role in answering the research questions and supporting the findings.

a. Primary Data

The primary data consisted of original, firsthand information gathered through the following instruments:

- **Classroom Observations:** Researchers observed how applied drama techniques were implemented in English lessons. Notes were taken on student participation, speaking confidence, listening responses, and teacher facilitation during activities such as role-plays, improvisation, and dramatic storytelling.
- **Semi-structured Interviews:** Interviews were conducted with English teachers and students. Questions focused on their experiences, perceived benefits, challenges faced, and the overall impact of drama-based instruction on speaking and listening development.
- **Learning Documentation:** Artifacts such as lesson plans, student worksheets, performance scripts, and reflective journals were collected. These documents helped triangulate the data by showing how applied drama was planned, delivered, and received in real classroom contexts.

b. Secondary Data

Secondary data were obtained from published academic sources that support the conceptual framework of the study. These include:

- Peer-reviewed journals on applied drama in education
- Articles related to learner-centered teaching and communicative language teaching
- Studies on listening and speaking development in EFL contexts

These secondary sources served as theoretical and contextual support, allowing the researcher to situate the findings within broader educational discussions and existing literature.

c. Data Analyze

In this study, data analysis was carried out using a qualitative thematic analysis approach. This method is suitable for interpreting patterns, meanings, and insights from non-numerical data, especially those gathered through observations, interviews, and documentation. The process consisted of several stages:

Data Organization

All data from field notes, interview transcripts, and classroom documents were organized and grouped according to type and source. Digital folders and coding labels were used to classify data under categories such as "student engagement," "listening response," and "teacher facilitation."

Initial Coding

The researcher conducted open coding by reading through the data line by line to identify recurring ideas or expressions related to speaking and listening improvement through drama. Codes were assigned to these segments, such as "improved pronunciation," "peer interaction," or "active listening."

Theme Development

After coding, the researcher grouped similar codes into broader categories or **themes**. Some of the prominent themes included:

- Increased student confidence in speaking
- Active listening through storytelling and role-play
- The effectiveness of learner-centered drama activities
- Challenges in classroom management during drama

Interpretation and Cross-Validation

Each theme was interpreted in light of relevant theories (e.g., Vygotsky's social interaction theory, communicative language teaching). Findings were also compared across schools to identify similarities or variations. Triangulation was conducted by cross-checking data from different sources (interviews, observations, documents) to ensure reliability and depth.

Linking Data to Research Questions

Finally, the analyzed themes were used to answer the research questions. For example, the theme "increased speaking fluency" directly addressed how applied drama improved oral communication, while "learner autonomy" supported findings about learner-centered approaches.

Research Results and Discussion

A. Key Findings

Based on the data collected through observations, interviews several key findings emerged regarding the use of applied drama techniques in enhancing speaking and listening skills among EFL students:

1. **Improved Speaking Fluency and Confidence.** Students who engaged in role-plays, improvisation, and dramatic storytelling demonstrated noticeable improvements in speaking fluency. They used a wider range of vocabulary, more natural intonation, and showed less hesitation when speaking in front of others.
2. **Enhanced Active Listening Skills.** Drama activities, especially those involving dialogue and group performance, required students to listen attentively to their peers to respond accurately. Many students improved in turn-taking, understanding context, and responding spontaneously.
3. **Higher Engagement and Motivation.** Students were more enthusiastic and participative during drama-based English lessons compared to traditional lectures. Teachers reported increased class attendance, active group collaboration, and a more supportive classroom environment.
4. **Strengthened Peer Interaction.** Applied drama encouraged meaningful interaction among students. Through group scenes and character exploration, learners practiced real communication and supported each other's language development.
5. **Challenges in Implementation.** Teachers noted some challenges such as managing classroom discipline, time constraints, and the need for adequate training in drama-based pedagogy. Nonetheless, they viewed the overall impact as positive and worth refining.

B. Discussion

These findings confirm the role of applied drama not only as a pedagogical tool but also as a transformative medium in language learning. Echoing Vygotsky's theory of social interaction, students' communicative

competence grew through collaboration, shared roles, and active listening. Applied drama aligns with the learner-centered approach (Yunus, 2018), where learners are given autonomy and meaningful context to explore language use. The dynamic and creative space provided by drama activities allowed for both cognitive and affective engagement, which supported sustained language acquisition. Furthermore, the increased fluency and listening comprehension observed among participants support the argument made by Fadilah (2018) and Antoro & Pantow (2019), who emphasized drama's contribution to language immersion. The experiential nature of drama-based learning makes abstract language concepts more tangible and memorable. However, consistent with Astutik's (2022) observations, the research also highlights the importance of training and support for teachers to successfully integrate drama in EFL classrooms. Without adequate preparation, drama may be seen as disruptive rather than educational. The findings of this study provide strong evidence that applied drama techniques significantly contribute to the development of speaking and listening skills in EFL contexts, particularly within Indonesian classrooms. The use of role-plays, improvisational activities, and storytelling facilitated students' engagement in authentic communication, which is often lacking in traditional language instruction. Students not only improved in terms of fluency and vocabulary usage, but also developed a greater sense of confidence when using English to express opinions or perform dialogues. This aligns with the view that drama allows learners to "experience the language" rather than simply memorize it (Fadilah, 2018).

In terms of listening skills, drama provided students with real-time, contextual listening practice. They needed to actively listen to their peers to understand cues, respond accordingly, and follow the flow of the scene. This kind of interaction promotes responsive listening, which is a vital component of communicative competence (Antoro & Pantow, 2019). Another important implication is the strong support for a learner-centered approach, as emphasized by Yunus (2018). In the drama-based classroom, students became co-constructors of meaning. They were not passive recipients of knowledge but rather active participants in their learning process. This fosters not only linguistic skills, but also soft skills such as collaboration, empathy, and problem-solving. However, despite its benefits, applied drama techniques are not without challenges. Teachers need proper training and preparation to manage time, classroom dynamics, and ensure all students are engaged. As Astutik (2022) highlighted, many teachers may initially feel unprepared or hesitant to apply drama due to lack of experience. In conclusion, the findings support the integration of applied drama in language teaching, especially for developing speaking and listening skills. However, successful implementation requires institutional support, teacher training, and a shift in pedagogical mindset toward more experiential and student-centered learning.

C. Benefits and Obstacle of Applied Drama

Applied drama helps develop:

- Speaking fluency through repeated, contextualized use of language.
- Listening skills, as students must respond to peers and follow evolving dialogues.
- Confidence and motivation, especially for shy or anxious learners.
- Support for Learner-Centered Approach
- Development of Soft Skills

Astutik (2022) observed that students in Lampung became more engaged and expressive when drama was integrated into lessons. However, on the other hand, there are aspects that should be carefully observed. Despite its many proven benefits in enhancing speaking, listening, and overall learner engagement, the implementation of applied drama in EFL classrooms does not come without challenges.

- One major obstacle is the lack of adequate teacher preparation and confidence. Many educators, especially those trained in more traditional or lecture-based methods, may feel unprepared or even intimidated by the creative and improvisational nature of drama-based instruction. As a result, they may avoid or limit its use in the classroom.
- Additionally, rigid academic schedules and standardized curricula often leave little room for innovative practices like applied drama. Teachers are frequently pressured to complete

certain units or prepare students for national exams, leaving minimal flexibility for more experiential, student-centered learning methods. This time constraint can lead to a prioritization of textbook-based instruction over interactive methods.

- Classroom management is another significant concern, particularly in countries like Indonesia where classrooms are often large and student-to-teacher ratios are high. Implementing drama requires organizing movement, noise, and active participation, which can be difficult to manage without strong classroom control and sufficient space.

To address these barriers, Yunus (2018) recommends comprehensive teacher training programs that include drama pedagogy as part of professional development. Furthermore, he emphasizes the importance of institutional and administrative support. When schools and educational leaders recognize the pedagogical value of applied drama and provide structural support such as time allocation, classroom facilities, and encouragement teachers are more likely to adopt and sustain these methods in their practice.

Summary and Recommendations

A. Summary

This study highlights the significant potential of applied drama techniques in improving English language learners' speaking and listening skills. Through dynamic activities such as role-playing, improvisation, and storytelling, students are not only encouraged to use the target language more fluently and confidently, but also to engage in meaningful, real-life communication. These techniques create a classroom atmosphere that fosters creativity, empathy, collaboration, and active listening essential components of communicative competence. Furthermore, applied drama supports a learner-centered approach by positioning students as active agents in their own learning process. Rather than relying solely on rote memorization or passive instruction, learners take part in constructing meaning and using language in context. The success of such practices, especially within Indonesian classrooms, reflects the readiness of students to embrace experiential learning when provided with the right support and guidance. Despite its promise, the implementation of drama-based methods faces real challenges such as limited teacher training, rigid curricula, and classroom management issues. However, these obstacles are not insurmountable if there is institutional will and investment in professional development.

B. Recommendations

1. Integrate Applied Drama into Language Curricula: Schools and educational institutions should begin to recognize the pedagogical value of drama and allocate time and space within the curriculum for its application.
2. Provide Practical Teacher Training: Teachers need structured training that focuses not only on theory but on real classroom strategies for using drama effectively and confidently.
3. Encourage Flexible Learning Approaches: Education stakeholders should adopt a more flexible approach to language learning that values creativity, collaboration, and student-centered activities.
4. Foster Supportive Learning Environments: Classrooms should be adapted to allow movement, group interaction, and expressive freedom—creating a safe space for learners to explore language through drama.
5. Promote a Cultural Shift in Language Education: Ultimately, the success of applied drama depends on a broader shift in how we view language education—from rigid formality to human-centered, expressive interaction.

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