



Effects of Applying Drama-Based Activities in Speaking Classes on EFL Students' Speaking Performance

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The purpose of this study is to investigate the effects of applying drama-based activities in speaking classes on high school English as a foreign language (EFL) students' speaking performance in terms of grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, fluency and discourse management; and their perceptions of implementing drama-based activities in speaking lessons. This quasi-experimental study which used the mixed method approach was conducted with the participation of sixty eleventh-grade students at a high school in Can Tho city. The quantitative data from the results of the pre-test and post-test were done to find out the effects of applying drama-based activities on high school EFL students' speaking performance. The quantitative and qualitative data from the questionnaire and interviews focused on students' perceptions of implementing drama-based activities in speaking lessons. The findings of the study reveal that drama-based activities had positive effects on students' speaking performance, especially in term of discourse management and students had positive perceptions of implementing drama-based activities in speaking lessons.

Keywords: drama-based activities, students, speaking performance, EFL, speaking

INTRODUCTION

Among many subjects at high schools, English is considered as an efficient tool to support students in their daily life. Particularly, communicative competence in English is one of the most crucial criteria for students to integrate with the globe effectively (issued with circular No.32/2018/TT-BGDĐT on December 26, 2018 of the Minister of Education and training). Thus, students need to learn how to convey their ambitions, desires, and goals effectively in the classroom. Among all the four language skills, speaking skill is considered as the most important skill in order to communicate well in this global world (Bailey & Savage 1994). In addition, some researchers believe that speaking is a main part in language education settings (Kao & O'Neill, 1998; Ur, 1996; Halley & Austin, 2004; Nunan, 1991). Goh and Burns (2012) state that speaking not only offers affordances for learning but also is a significant component of learning outcomes and syllabus content (p.165). According to Burkart and Sheppard (2004); Ellis (2003); Kramersch (1987); Mackey (2012); Nunan (1999); Richards and Rodgers (2001), the roles of speaking indicate how learners reflect their ability to use the target

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language for interaction or how successful they are in learning a foreign language. In addition, speaking skill is also considered as influencing other language skills (Gass & Varonis, 1994). Increased speaking results can help promote development of writing (Trachsel & Severino, 2004), and listening (Regina, 1997) and reading (Garner, 2000). However, some researchers concluded that most EFL teachers paid much attention to lecturing and teaching grammatical points instead of language use (Lochana & Deb, 2016). They mostly use their mother tongue as the means to convey their instructions. Such matters cause the failure of the interaction in a language classroom and it does not promote the use of the target language (Khamkhien, 2010). Furthermore, many English language teachers do not equip students with the tools that they will need for 'real-life' communication where fluency is the primary goal and not just accuracy which is promoted within the traditional approaches.

Drama is considered as a modern and advanced technique to teach speaking skill. It was not until the 1980s, drama in communicative language teaching was introduced to "build around notion, functions, skills, tasks or other non-grammatical units of organization", which continues to "shape approaches in teaching speaking skills today" (Richards, 2008, p.2). Moreover, applying drama-based activities seems to be an ideal approach for students to enhance and practice their speaking skill effectively. Hui (2011) and Kaiyi (2006) point out that with drama, teachers can apply the use of authentic classroom resources, encourage student speech participation, maximize students' presentation time, engage students in collaborative learning, and provide support and feedback for students in speaking classes. Particularly, it provides students with the opportunity to socially interact through meaningful activities in which students build up their knowledge (Aldavero et al., 2008); gives support to learners' speaking skill and reduce their nervousness during the activities in the classroom (Demircioğlu, 2015); provides opportunities for students to use the target language in a meaningful context and situations which are similar to their real-life situations (Schejbal, 2006); motivates students' language learning (Ashton-Hay, 2005; Maley & Duff, 2005). Therefore, drama technique is a natural and meaningful way to activate students' imagination and background knowledge through some interesting and purposeful activities.

This study was conducted to clarify the effects of applying drama-based activities on high school EFL students' speaking performance in Can Tho city. In some degree, the potentialities of this technique are supposed to address the context of high school EFL students' speaking performance in terms of grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, fluency and discourse management. It is hoped that this research can fill the gaps left by other studies which mostly focused on speaking skills in general, not specific aspects of the speaking skills.

Review of the Literature

Drama and drama-based activities

"Drama deals with the mind, heart and body as one unit" (Barakat, 2022, p. 105). In language education, the term drama is defined as "any kind of activity which includes action" by Adıgüzel (2018). Moreover, according to Way (1967), he defined drama as an activity of art in which by presenters' skills and knowledge, they can act out freely on

the stage in front of many audiences. Moreover, drama is the "communication between people" which helps people express their thoughts or ideas (Via, 1987, p.110). In other words, it is used for communicative purposes (Somers, 1994). Therefore, drama is known as the activities in which learners use the target language in a certain task or a particular situation (Siririmangkorn & Suwanthep, 2013; Cockett, 2000; Holden, 1982; Mok, 2012).

Drama activities, according to Scrivener (2005), includes drama-based activities such as role-play, drama games - short games, acting play scripts - short written sketches or scenes, simulation, guided improvisation, prepared improvised drama short scene or story. In reality, drama-based activities are the combination of different activities such as role-play, mime, simulation, improvisation and script. Therefore, learners should use flexibly in speaking classes (Sun, 2003) because they may apply them in their own lives. In this research, all of the above-mentioned drama-based activities were applied.

Speaking and speaking performance

Sarac (2007) states that speaking combines both receptive skill and productive skill in communication because it is a two-way process between listeners and speakers. Brown (1994), Burns and Joyce (1997), they suggest that there are three fundamental components in speaking process including generating, receiving, and processing input. Besides, Chaney (1998) investigates that speaking relates to "the process of building and sharing meaning through the use of verbal and non-verbal symbols, in a variety of contexts" (p. 13).

Among these above-mentioned definitions, we can see that they have a common characteristic in the literature that learners can express their own views during the oral interaction. However, it can be noted that among the definitions, they have different interpretations of speaking. In terms of the purposes of this study, learners deliver their thoughts, desires and emotions in forms of monologues or dialogues accurately and appropriately in speaking.

"Performance, denotes the production of actual utterances as a result of certain psychological processes" (De Kort & Leerdam as cited in Hemerka, 2009, p. 14). Among the three aspects of speaking competence (knowledge of language and discourse, communication strategies and core speaking skills) mentioned by Goh and Burns (2012), there were two components of speaking performance consisting of knowledge of language and discourse, and core speaking skills considered as the process of assessing students' oral production in this study. Particularly, in terms of knowledge of language and discourse, it includes the mastery of grammar (structures), vocabulary and pronunciation such as stress, sounds, intonation and comprehensibility of meanings in the conversation. Relating to the core speaking skills, it involves the interaction and discourse management. It means that learners know how to negotiate meanings of utterances, respond and generate conversations. Therefore, drama is considered as useful speaking activities that help learners an opportunity to engage in an interactive learning environment.

To measure high school EFL students' speaking performance, the rubrics from VSTEP are selected. It includes six reference levels - A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, C2 based on CEFR. There are four criteria in marking speaking performance: accuracy, pronunciation, fluency and discourse management in VSTEP and they are assessed through three parts of performance including social interaction, discussion and topic development in speaking test. As regards pronunciation, learners are assessed by stress of words, appropriate intonation, intelligibility, and clear individual sounds. With fluency, learners frequently produce extended stretches of language with little hesitation, maintain fluent and natural flow with little repetition or error correction. Besides, they use pauses to search for suitable ideas for difficult concepts. For discourse management, it is the way learners are assessed by their ability to produce connected and coherent speech. In short, the researcher uses these aspects (accuracy, pronunciation, fluency and discourse management) to measure students' oral performance in this study.

Drama- based activities in relation to speaking performance

Drama- based activities play a significant role in speaking performance and they have a close relationship in teaching English as a foreign language. There are many researchers investigating that drama-based activities are strongly connected with the aspect of oral production in terms of pronunciation, speaking performance, accuracy and interactive communication (Cho, 2015; Sirisrimangkorn & Suwanthep, 2013; Belliveau & Kim, 2013; Brash & Warnecke, 2009; Magos & Politi, 2008; Livingstone, 1983; Maley & Duff, 1982; Wagner, 1998).

In terms of pronunciation, pragmatic awareness, discourse intonation and nonverbal communication practiced in an integrated way are effective components of communicative competence subsumed in drama-based activities (Goodwin, 2001, p.12). Therefore, those aspects help learner act out the roles in drama-based activities expressively (Ashton-Hay, 2005). In addition, drama-based activities provide learners with efficient learning environment encouraging learners to volitionally interact with the others (Via, 1976; Smith, 1984; Wessels 1987) or maintain the classroom engagement in an exciting classroom (Zafeiriadou, 2009). Moreover, social interaction and the increased level of self-confidence are also created during drama-based activities. Thus, learners are ready to take risks in speaking English, take the ownership of their learning, investigate more new ideas, rephrase and edit the content of plays and express their own viewpoints meaningfully as cited in Stinson's research "they shape, rehearse and modify the text" (Stinson, 2006, p.4). Furthermore, learners can highly activate their inventive mind via participating in drama-based activities because they may self-discover to express more innovative thoughts, ideas and vocabulary for real-life situations, so this may help learners speak English effectively over a period of time (Hutt et al., 1989).

With regard to speaking performance, drama-based activities give learners opportunities to experience lexicon, registers and speech patterns when they are taking the roles in speaking classes (Wagner, 1998). Sam (1990) continues to state "drama helps to extend, retain and reinforce vocabulary and sentence structure through role-play and communication games" (p. 86). Particularly, Neelands (1992) points out that drama-

based activities make learners freely utter word choice, word use, speech style, vocabulary and grammar while talking.

Relating to interactive communication, according to Kao and O'Neill (1998, p.25), the selected contexts in drama-based activities for interactive situations stimulate learners to interact with the others variously in terms of asking and answering questions, solving problems, offering both information and opinions, arguing and persuading, and fulfilling the widest range of language functions" while drama is being processed". Through real-life related scenarios in drama-based activities, learners practice language for different purposes (Stinson, 2006).

Related studies on drama-based activities

There are many studies conducted by various researchers in relevance to effects of drama-based activities on students' speaking performance in language teaching and learning.

The first study was conducted by Nhi in 2017 with thirty freshmen at An Giang university. It is about drama-based role play activities to impact students' speaking performance. The researcher used the pre- and post- tests and interview to collect the data. The findings reveal that students in the experimental group got more positive effects in their speaking performance. Also, it finds out that students had positive attitudes towards the use of this technique in the classroom.

The next study concerns about Effects of Dramatic Activities on Improving English Communicative Speaking Skill by Prisana and Sakon (2015) at high school in Thailand. The research instruments used to collect data were the speaking test and questionnaire. The results were that after using dramatic activities to teach speaking skill, students made progress in English communicative speaking skill and their attitudes to this technique on speaking were highly positive.

The study conducted by Aryn (2021) is about the effects of drama activities on EFL students in Kazakhstan. The researcher used the pre- and post- tests, questionnaire and interview to find out the effect of drama on students in EFL classroom. The results revealed that the use of drama in EFL greatly affected students. Also, it was to assure that drama activities benefited not only speaking skills of EFL learners, but also other factors such as confidence.

Miccoli (2003) conducted the study with 37 participants in a Brazilian University. She used students' portfolios and interviews to investigate how drama activities influenced her students' oral skills. The results showed that in the aspects of structure, vocabulary and pronunciation, they greatly improve students' speaking competence.

Another empirical study was undertaken at high schools in Singapore by Stinson and Freebody (2006) to investigate whether the use of role play activities during the learning process improves students' oral communication skills in English or not. Speaking tests and interviews were used to collect the data in this study. The results revealed that the intervention group made more significant progress than the comparison group in the criteria of clarity, vocabulary, relevance to topic, interaction with the examiner and the need for prompting.

The effects of role-play on students' speaking ability were also investigated by Rahimy and Safarpour (2012) in sixty intermediate language learners at Shokouh Language Institute in Bandar Anzali, Iran. The researchers used the questionnaire, interview and speaking test to collect the data. The findings showed that all participants had higher scores after applying role-play and they had positive attitudes to this technique.

Finally, Sirisrimangkorn and Suwanthep (2013) conducted the effectiveness of drama-based role play combined with student teams' achievement division (STAD) on students' speaking skills and affective involvement with 80 non-native undergraduate students in a university in Thailand. The instruments used to collect data were pre- and post- test, interview and questionnaire. The results were that drama-based role play and cooperative learning had significant effects on students' speaking skills.

In general, most of the previous studies indicate that drama activities have greatly positive effects on students' speaking performance. Especially, this technique plays a significant role in improving speaking performance among language skills and stimulating learners' attitudes toward studying English. However, those studies just made very general conclusion that these activities helped improve students' speaking performance. This study focused on their effects on specific speaking components such as grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, fluency and discourse management.

METHOD

Research design

The research was quasi-experimental in nature and mixed-methods approach was adopted. Quantitative data was collected via questionnaire, a pre- test and a post- test when applying drama- based activities. The researcher chose convenience sampling by selecting two teaching classes in grade 11 (one class for the experimental group and the other class for the control group) to enhance the validity of the study. The participants in the experimental group were exposed to drama-based activities whereas those in the control group received the treatment introduced in the textbook over an eight-week period.

Participants

Sixty eleventh- grade students who were studying at Thanh An high school in Can Tho city in the second term of academic year 2021-2022 were chosen to participate in the research. They were chosen because the researcher was assigned to teach these two classes. The age of the participants was around 16 to 17 years old. They were randomly assigned to the experimental group and the control group with 30 participants per group.

Research instruments

Pre- and post-speaking tests

In this study, the pre-test was administered in the first week of the experiment and the post-test was conducted in the final week to assess students' oral performance. The pre- and post- speaking tests were similar in form. The researcher designed the tests basing

on the format of VSTEP (Vietnamese Standardise Test of English Proficiency). The test is designed by the Ministry of Education and Training of Vietnam to certify English proficiency of Vietnamese users. The topics of the tests were what students have learnt from the textbook of English 11 such as Family (Unit1); Relationships (Unit 2); Life skills (Unit 3) and Volunteer Work (Unit 4). The tests included three parts: social interaction in order to assess the students' speaking fluency, discussion of solutions to a problem in which the participants were provided a problem and two or more solutions and were asked to give his/her opinions on the best solution among the provided solutions and compare and explain why the selected solution was the best and developing verbal discussion on a specific topic in which the participants talked about a general or academic topic. In this part they could use provided ideas or develop their own ideas. Each student had ten minutes to do the test. The students' oral performance was recorded and rated by three raters including two English teaching speaking teachers who had the experience in English language teaching for more than five years in the researcher's school and the researcher to enhance the inner-rater reliability of a grading process.

The researcher adapted the assessment criteria from VSTEP. It was used for both pre- and post-speaking tests. The rating criteria of ten-band scoring system with 1 as the lowest and 10 the highest for scoring students' performance. There are six criteria from the VSTEP rubric: vocabulary, content, pronunciation, fluency, grammar, and communication strategy. However, in this study, the researcher adapted and selected only five criteria to assess students' speaking performance including grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, fluency and discourse management.

The questionnaire

The researcher used a 5-point Likert-type scales questionnaire with choices ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree" to find out the understandings, effects, attitudes and challenges perceived by high school EFL students when they are taught English speaking skill by applying drama-based activities. The findings of some previous studies presented in Literature Review were used to design the questionnaire. Also, the researcher adapted it based on Lee's (2007), Shagofah and Parigul's (2020) studies about drama-based activities. Each item had 5 degrees meaning 1: strongly disagree, 2: disagree, 3: uncertain, 4: agree and 5: strongly agree. The questionnaire consists of two domains. The first one includes open-ended questions about participants' information. The second one consists of thirty-five statements of five-point Likert scale items about students' perceptions in terms of drama-based activities. There are four clusters including students' understanding of drama; the effects of drama; students' attitudes and the challenges of students when applying drama-based activities in speaking classes. The questionnaire was translated into Vietnamese "to maximize the understanding, save time and achieve full completions from the Vietnamese participants", (Nguyen et al., 2022, p.441) The detailed items of each cluster are shown in Table 1.

Table 1
Item categories in the questionnaire

Clusters	Items
Students' understandings of drama	From 1 to 5
The effects of drama	From 6 to 21
Students' attitudes toward drama	From 22 to 30
Students' challenges in learning speaking lessons with drama	From 31 to 35

Interviews

An interview was regarded as "an interaction taken place in a spoken form in that one person can obtain the information from another in person or over the phone" (Fraenkel et al., 2012, p. 120). Moreover, an interview was considered as a source of qualitative data relating to the "interaction" which helps the researcher get a particular goal (Gay, Mill & Airasian, 2011, p.387). In addition, the attitude was "a psychological tendency that was expressed by evaluating a particular entity with some degree of favor or disfavor" (Eagly, & Chaiken, 1993, p. 1). What is more, Passer and Smith (2007) continue to support that the attitude can be negative or positive reaction towards an attitude about matters or objects via responses.

The aims of the interview were to know what interviewees think and how they feel and experience about a certain topic. Generally, there were four types of interviews including semi-structured interview, structured interview, informal interview, and retrospective interview. To further explore the students' attitudes towards drama-based activities, a semi-structured interview was administered after the post-speaking test. Semi-structured interview subsumed the characteristics of both unstructured and structured interviews. With this kind of interview, based on the basic questions, both the interviewer and interviewees could investigate more details for the data needed (Gill et al., 2008). In this study there were 5 participants selected randomly from the participants in the experimental group for the interview and the interview was conducted in Vietnamese to make it convenient for the interviewees to express their opinions.

The interview questions focused on the effects of drama-based activities (questions 1 and 2).

1. How do you evaluate drama-based activities in speaking classes?
2. What did you get from studying speaking with this technique?

Treatment for the two groups

In generally, lesson plans for both experimental group and control group were designed based on the contents of English 11 for ten-year program. However, the researcher used different techniques in each lesson plan. Specifically, for the experimental group, the researcher designed four lesson plans applying drama-based activities in eight weeks and they were assessed by the supervisor. Besides, there were four projects relating to drama-based activities for students to practice. Each lesson was taught in 45 minutes. There are five stages in the lesson plans including warm-up stage, presentation stage, practice stage, further practice stage and free practice stage. Furthermore, the lesson plans consist of various activities for students such as matching, brainstorming ideas,

describing the pictures, listening to the video clips, working in pairs or groups, playing and disguising roles with a given real-life topic. On the other hand, for the control group, the researcher still used the traditional lesson plans with three-stage procedure such as presentation stage, practice stage and production stage. Students just listen and do the tasks in the textbook.

Data analysis

The researcher used Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS 20.0) to analyze descriptive statistics and reliability of the quantitative data collected through questionnaires. There were 30 participants with different language abilities from the other classes for the reliability to test their comprehension of the options and the statements based on the ordinal scale taking part in the pilot and the scale reliability coefficient Cronbach's Alpha (α) was 0.805. This reliability coefficient of the questionnaire has proven that the questionnaire was acceptable to be used for conducting research with a larger number of participants. The items were organized according to the principles of Likert Scale (1934).

For the qualitative data, the researcher applied thematic analysis by (Thomas & Harden, 2008). Firstly, the responses of the interviewees were transcribed then translated into English. Next, they were synthesized by salient themes which were indicated by repetition of words, key-word-in-context, compare and contrast. Finally, the themes were analyzed for more insightful understandings and interpretation.

FINDINGS

The effects of applying drama-based activities on students' speaking performance

Test - Before the experiment

Table 2 below shows the average pretest scores of students' speaking performance between control and experimental groups (M=6.70, M=6.75 respectively). The mean difference at .08 was small and no statistically significant difference was found from the results of the t-test for independent samples (t=.51, df=58, p=.61). It might be assumed that the groups started the program with quite similar level of speaking performance.

Table 2
Independent Samples t-Test (pre-test)

Variable	Group	N	t	df	Mean	Sig.(2 tailed)	MD
Pretest	Control	30	.51	58	6.70	.61	.08
	Experimental	30			6.75		

Test - After the experiment

As can be seen from table 3, there was a slight change in the mean scores between control and experimental groups after the study. Specifically, the mean score of students' speaking performance in the treatment group (M=8.65) was much higher than that of the control group (M= 8.05). Nevertheless, there was a significant difference between two study groups (t=-3.4, df=58, p=.001). The results indicated that drama-based activities on students' speaking performance are more effective than the traditional method.

Table 3
Independent Samples t-Test (post-test)

Variable	Group	N	t	df	Mean	Sig.(2 tailed)	MD
Posttest	Control	30	-3.40	58	8.05	.001	-.60
	Experimental	30			8.65	.001	

Students' level of grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, fluency and discourse management

The Paired Sample T-Test was run to test which level of students' speaking aspects in terms of grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, fluency and discourse management before and after the experiment is improved after the study. Table 4 below indicated the results of participants' speaking performance in the experimental group.

Table 4
Paired Samples T-Test (pre- and post-tests)

		Paired Differences				t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference Lower Upper			
Pair 1	G2PGrammarpretest - G2GrammarPosttest	-.32000	.39862	.07278	-.46885	-.17115	-4.397	29 .000
Pair 2	G2VocabularyPretest - G2VocabularyPosttest	-.42667	.41930	.07655	-.58324	-.27010	-5.573	29 .000
Pair 3	G2PronunciationPretest - G2PronunciationPosttest	-.44000	.49661	.09067	-.62544	-.25456	-4.853	29 .000
Pair 4	G2FluencyPretest - G2FluencyPosttest	-.38667	.37114	.06776	-.52525	-.24808	-5.706	29 .000
Pair 5	G2DiscoursemanagementPretest - G2DiscoursemanagementPosttest	-.29333	.29587	.05402	-.40381	-.18285	-5.430	29 .000

The findings showed that the average posttest scores of grammar (M= 1.72), vocabulary (M=1.73), pronunciation (M=1.70), fluency (M=1.53) and discourse management (M=1.96) increased in general. In other words, difference among these means was observed after the study (t=-4.39, df=29, p=.00; t=-5.57, df=29, p=.00; t=-4.85, df=29, p=.00; t=-5.70, df=29, p=.00; t=-5.43, df=29, p=.00 respectively). Therefore, it could be said that students' level of these speaking aspects after the study was higher than that before the study.

Students' perceptions about the effects of drama-based activities

Questionnaire

The *Descriptive Statistics Test* was run to explore the mean scores, maximum, minimum, and standard deviation of students' perceptions of applying drama-based activities in speaking lessons. The results of the Descriptive Statistics Test are exhibited in Table 5.

Table 5
Descriptive statistics test of the questionnaire

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Perceptions	30	2.77	4.46	3.5619	.35411
Valid N (listwise)	30				

As shown in Table 5, the mean score about students' perceptions of applying drama-based activities in speaking classes ($M = 3.5$, $SD = .354$) reveals that students had high positive perceptions of applying drama-based activities in speaking classes (compared with five points in five-point Likert type).

Students' perceptions about categories of drama-based activities

There are four clusters including students' understanding of drama; the effects of drama; students' attitudes and the challenges of students when applying drama-based activities in speaking classes. In this section, the Descriptive Statistic Test was used to evaluate the total mean scores for each cluster. The results of the tests were shown in Table 6 below.

Table 6
Students' perceptions of the importance of each cluster about drama-based activities

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Understandings	30	2.60	4.80	3.7600	.46208
effects	30	2.50	4.69	3.6104	.51005
attitudes	30	2.67	4.78	3.6741	.46681
challenges	30	1.60	4.00	3.0067	.54452
Valid N (listwise)	30				

As can be seen, the results showed that students' understandings of drama ($M=3.76$; $SD=.46$), effects of drama-based activities ($M=3.61$; $SD=.51$) and students' attitudes about drama ($M= 3.67$; $SD=.47$) were higher than their challenges toward drama ($M= 3.00$; $SD= .54$). Particularly, the perceptions of the understandings of drama is the highest. After that, Pair Sample T-test was run on the means of each pair of clusters: students' understandings of drama and effects of drama-based activities; effects of drama-based activities and students' attitudes about drama-based activities; students' attitudes about drama-based activities and challenges toward drama. The result indicated that no difference among the three means was observed ($t=2.6$; $p=.013$); ($t=-1.09$, $p=.285$ respectively). Participants' perceptions in both understanding, effects and attitudes are the same. However, the findings also showed that there are the significant differences ($t=4.12$, $p=.00$). Participants' perceptions about their attitudes and the challenges are different.

Interview

When participants were asked about the use of drama-based activities, they had positive attitudes towards these activities. They also agreed that drama-based activities benefited them from language learning such as vocabulary, grammar, collaborative learning, confidence, and interactive communication skills.

Relating to the accuracy of vocabulary and grammar, all the respondents highly appreciate benefits of drama-based activities toward the use of grammar and vocabulary precisely. It is considered as the results of learning from mistakes, friends, drama-based activities, looking-up dictionary and searching information from Google, and self-study. For example, student A said,

“Drama helps me increase my vocabulary and grammar. When my friends speak English very well, I actually do not have sufficient vocabulary and grammar but in

order to talk more with my friends and share an experience, it requires me to ask my friends, look up the dictionary to know the exact sounds of the words and self-study at home to improve vocabulary and structures". (Student A)

Beside vocabulary and grammar, there were two informants expressed that through practice or rehearsing, drama helped them learn pronunciation more efficiently. According to student B, and student D,

"About pronunciation, when we do a role-play, we will make a video clip so when looking it back, I know what mistakes I made, and then I will correct them." and "I could not pronounce the word "furnished" correctly at the first time but now I practice pronouncing it many times when I take part in role-plays, I could pronounce it correctly." (Students B, D)

Moreover, fluency was incessantly improved during taking part in drama-based activities. One participant stated,

"I am able to speak English more fluently and faster, at first, I hesitate when someone talks to me and there is the lack of confidence in speaking English, but gradually, adapting to the frequent use of English, practicing more and talking in a long time will help speak smoothly". (Student B)

Another benefit stated by respondents was related to cooperative learning. Most of them believed that drama-based activities helped them enhance their collaborative skill. Perhaps, these activities held by teacher must be joined in groups so that students get familiar with working with the others. Two of them responded,

"When we study with you, you always ask us to work in groups, so I have to cooperate with my friends to create a dialogue. From that, I know how to work in groups well"

And *"Taking part in the activities helps me interact with my friends better because we need to cooperate with each other to cast someone in a role, create a dialogue to produce a good play". (Students B, E)*

With regard to confidence, the respondents revealed:

...Previously, I used to be a shy person. Whenever the teacher calls me, I do not dare to say anything. However, when I start to speak from the time working with my friends for classroom assignments, I have confidence in speaking in front of my friends". Student E added more, "Thanks to the process of interaction in drama-based activities, I am able to practice speaking English more often in class, so I am able to speak rather fluently and I am more confident. I dare to look at the partners". (Students A, E)

Furthermore, role-plays were thought to be useful in real life by the respondents, too. Student A stated, *"Through these activities, I know more about the ways of offering gifts, renting a flat, table manners, diverse cultures or how to behave with surrounding people". Student B expressed, "Drama-based activities helps us how to deal with a situation when we play the same real matters, characters or a job in reality... I can use the language in a real situation and deploy the behaviors of figures learned into real life".*

These participants showed the importance of how to behave or communicate with others appropriately in the outside world through drama in speaking classes.

One more code in the effects of applying drama-based is interactive communication skills. There were three interviewees uttered this aspect in speaking classes. For instance, student C said: *“When playing a role of discussing to choose the best suitable gift for a friend, we actually do not have time to prepare for the content, we act like a real meeting and then talk. This helps me react to English situations”*. Student D also replied, *“Because you often ask us to develop a conversation for future (would be) situations, so when doing a role-play, I can react to the situation. I can develop them in a suitable way like I know what to say next while speaking and also find more ideas”*.

Based on these comments, it can be assumed that drama enabled them to have proper ways of communication, and act out spontaneously while maintaining the conversation with others. Students C and D also indicated that in doing their roles, the script let them act out what came naturally and in real communication instead of being put in settings or set discourse.

Turning to simulation, a kind of drama-based activities, it was also positively evaluated because of its great benefits. Participants reported that simulation enabled them to apply knowledge into reality, develop language proficiency, foster cognitive and creativity, improve interactive communication, express viewpoints, and develop soft skills. The following statements were heard:

“So those hot problems make us understand more about the life. I know how to behave appropriately when I face those situations in real life”. (Student A)

“I know how to behave or talk in reality...via the activity of cultural fair such as table manners, ways of greeting... it helps me increase the politeness and use the language suitably when coming to another countries”. (Student E)

“When you gave us a problem-solving task about a certain aspect that we have never experienced before, we will learn vocabulary relating to that aspect in order to be able to talk when we solve a problem. We can also learn from friends”. (Students B)

“Because the situations help me think more. For example, we have never discussed such a task before. But when we study with you, you provide such tasks so I think more about how to solve a problem appropriately in my situation”. (Student C)

As a result, these respondents suggested that simulation helped them confront with real situations and they can find the solutions in their lives.

DISCUSSION

Students' speaking performance

The first research question asked how drama-based activities affect high school EFL students' speaking performance and which aspects of speaking performance were most developed by this technique.

The findings showed that in the control group, the level of students' speaking performance did not change much after the study while the level of students' speaking performance in the experimental group made more improvement after the study.

Therefore, it is obvious to state that drama-based activities enhanced students' speaking performance. This also confirmed that this technique could bring more benefits and develop high school EFL students' speaking performance.

Furthermore, the results from this study were in line with many previous researchers in their study such as Hubbard (1983); Via (1987); Helen (2000); Miccoli (2003); Zafeiriadou, (2009); Rahimy and Safarpour (2012); Sirisrimangkorn and Suwanthep (2013); Nouralian et al. (2013); Alrajhi et al., (2013); Gill (2013). All of them claimed that drama-based activities had positive effects on students' oral proficiency and enhance their communicative competences in speaking English. In this study, students could improve their speaking performance because of some following reasons.

First of all, through drama-based activities, students enriched their speaking aspects such as vocabulary, grammar, structures and pronunciation because they were given time to rehearse carefully before acting out in front of class. Moreover, students' prior knowledge could be improved and reinforced through drama-based activities (Mordecai, 1985; Fernandez & Coil, 1986; Sam, 1990). Besides, drama technique is considered as a valuable opportunity for students to show their latent ability in communication. Via drama-based activities, students would show not only their language speaking abilities but also their soft skills such as problem-solving skill, public speaking skill and so on. From that, they would make some adjustments for the new role, all of which were supposed to move their speaking performance forward.

Moreover, according to Early and Tarlington (1982); Mordecai (1985); Scharengnivei (1970), because of reality-related interactive activities, students might desire to use language as a means for communication in genuine via given scenarios rather than learned language at school. In addition, students had more chances to approach and practice the language for different purposes in real life situations (Stinson, 2006). Therefore, they could jump out the outside world naturally and develop the dialogues by themselves.

Nonthreatening learning environment is another reason for the improvement in the quality of students' speaking performance in a drama-based practice class (Wessels 1987; Smith, 1984; Via, 1976). Because students worked and collaborated with their friends during their practice time, they feel free and comfortable to use their language. Gradually, they acquired the target language naturally and effectively without any pressure. Additionally, according to Zafeiriadou (2009), drama-based activities mainly focused on student-student interaction. Therefore, students could feel at ease to participate in the activities with their friends regardless of errors made during speaking classes applied drama-based activities.

One more reason for the better results after applying drama-based activities is "breaking down the barriers between teacher and student" (Wessels, 1987, p. 14). During speaking classes, teachers are considered as a facilitator and supporter whereas students spend times practicing speaking with their peers. From that, students would develop not only their language skills but also their social skills comfortably.

Finally, the integration of all language skills such as listening, reading and writing in drama-based activities contributed to the enhancement of oral performance. When

students take part in drama-based activities, they must write down what they would speak first. They can be a mind map for main ideas, a detailed small skit, a dialogue for a conversation or a scenario. In this situation, students had to read and listen to the ideas or thoughts of their friends for discussion about the background information and the language that they might need to collect. According to (Gass & Selinker, 2001, p.302), "the negotiated interaction allowed learners to think about language and learn a language" when the information exchange took place. Especially, low-achieving students would have more opportunities to make some appropriate modifications when there were some language mistakes they produced. Also, the integration of four language skills promote students' speaking abilities when they practice English language use and modify their assigned roles in front of class.

Another part of the first question is that the students' level of grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, fluency and discourse management within the experimental group were most affected by drama. The findings revealed that there was significant difference in all aspects of speaking performance in terms of grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, fluency and discourse management. In other words, drama-based activities affect these dimensions positively. This finding indicated that learners might gain more benefits from grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, fluency and discourse management. Especially, discourse management was improved considerably by drama-based technique rather than the other aspects. On the other hand, this result was different from previous research by Alrajhi et al. (2013); Rahimy's and Safarpour (2012); Miccoli (2003). They investigated that both grammar and vocabulary were more improved after the study.

To explain for this result, there were some specific and convincing reasons that help students gain discourse management most. It could be that students likely experience and understand the behaviors, feelings of the characters they act out. Simultaneously, they could reflect beyond themselves when they interact with many people around them in a real English language environment. This factor was consistent with the previous literature by Paulston (1992) that drama is "exercises where the student can improvise some kind of behavior towards the other role characters" (Paulston, 1992, p.60). Besides, "students have the right to take the ownership of their own learning" (Stinson, 2006). In other words, they actively organize, set the scene and wrote the scripts according to the assignments they received from the teachers which their ability to maintain and initiate a conversation can be developed.

Students' perceptions towards the use of drama-based activities in speaking classes

The second research question asked about the perceptions of high school EFL students when drama-based activities were applied in speaking classes. The results from the questionnaires and semi-structured interviews revealed that participants had positive perceptions towards the implementation of drama-based activities in speaking classes. These findings were consensus with Gill (2013) results that students were interested in the use of drama-based activities because they could experience and improve their oral skills as well as increase their confidence in speaking English (Gill, 2013).

The explanation for the positive perceptions to the use of drama-based activities in speaking classes evaluated by the experimental related to the considerable improvement they achieved in their oral performance during the learning process. Dodson (2002) believes that a stress-free learning environment could make learners reduce their anxiety in speaking English and build up their self-confidence in their real-life. Therefore, they were willing to express their thoughts and learn from the others regarding to speaking aspects consisting of grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, fluency and discourse management.

From the questionnaires and students' interviews, drama could increase student-centered learning because students were asked to create a conversation and write scripts by themselves, synthesize, analyze and evaluate what and how they have just played the roles. Besides, students had to search by themselves to have sufficient knowledge of vocabulary, suitable contents and grammar for the interaction rather than waiting for teachers' assistance.

Additionally, drama-based activities made high-achieving students help low-achieving ones to speak the target language well. They were willing to give help to other peers about vocabulary, pronunciation and structure during the learning process. Moreover, learning community might be built up interestingly since they could communicate with their peers to express their own ideas without worrying about errors. Besides, when students act out on the stage with their friends, drama-based activities make them feel close-knit in English speaking classes.

Especially, students would have more opportunities to further practice beside the activities in the textbook. Therefore, these findings could assist participating students to gradually increase the level of self-confidence in conveying their ideas or thoughts in the crowd. According to Piazzoli (2011), he states that "walking into someone's shoes helps learners feel less shy to produce the target language". Truly, when students participated in drama-based activities, they might not receive bad feedback from others because the language produced was from the characters assigned.

Among grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, fluency and discourse management, discourse management was perceived as an important part in learning English by students at different proficiency levels. This element not only assist students in expressing their viewpoints naturally in real life but also help them how to establish moral and socio qualities, e.g. behaviors, acquired via drama-based activities which might contribute to effective communication real life contexts.

CONCLUSION, IMPLICATION, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study proved that drama-based activities were considered as potential instructional tool on EFL students' speaking performance through its findings. In other words, drama-based activities play a significant role in promoting high school EFL students' speaking performance at the context of Thanh An high school. Through speaking tests, this study presented the effects of drama-based activities on each element of speaking performance in terms of grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, fluency and discourse management. Specifically, significant results of discourse management were investigated in the pre-and post-tests which were higher than the other components.

Also, the findings from this study revealed that students with less English proficiency in linguistic forms could interact with others in speaking classes with the use of drama technique by starting a conversation and developing more ideas.

Relating to learners' attitudes toward the implementation of drama-based activities in speaking classes, the qualitative findings showed that drama technique was positively evaluated by participants.

Based on the findings, this study draws some pedagogical implications for teachers, students and administrators.

First of all, for teachers, positive effects of drama-based activities on speaking performance raise teachers' awareness of discourse management in relation to students' expectations. In other words, teachers will design the lesson plans by finding more ways to integrate drama-based activities into speaking classrooms. When students participate in the lessons, they are given opportunities to practice speaking through interactive tasks or real life contexts to enhance their motivation and their interest in learning how to use English in terms of grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, fluency and discourse management effectively. Additionally, a combination with the other techniques can be a good way for teachers in English lessons because students can be bored or unpleasant with the exposure solely to these activities throughout the learning process. Therefore, teachers need to use flexibly between drama technique and other ones speaking setting.

For students, it is obvious that drama-based activities bring much benefits to students. Particularly, they improve and foster students' oral interaction practices. Therefore, beside teachers' efforts, students must study responsibly by actively joining the lessons and cooperating with the teachers to make the speaking lesson successfully and ensure the positive effects of this technique on language learning. It may be that some students lack their enthusiasm and their motivation in learning. They are less active than the others or it could be possibly a result of affective filters such as low self-image; shyness; the lack of linguistic knowledge and public speaking skills.

There are some limitations in this study in terms of its contents and time. Firstly, because the researcher was also the teacher of the current study, his present knowledge of drama techniques was limited. Thus, the variety of drama activities provided by the teacher was mostly relied on one type of drama- role-plays. Secondly, there were only two classes involved in the research and their English proficiency may affect the research results. Thirdly, the time set up by the school was limited in forty-five minutes for a period. Therefore, both teacher and students lack time to complete all drama-based activities sufficiently or they just focus on the main parts of the drama. Moreover, the sample size was relatively limited in eleventh grade due to time constraints, which make the study weaken its generalizability.

Based on the limitations mentioned above and the results of the study. There are some recommendations for further studies, school administrators, educators and teachers,

First of all, with further studies, the future research may also explore the effects of drama on speaking skills of different number of students with different proficiency levels and different ages because the present study was conducted merely with pre-

intermediate level in eleventh grade. Besides, further studies need to investigate other language skills deeply relating to drama with the aim of developing learners' language skills completely because the findings also found out that drama affected both learners' reading skill, listening skill and writing skill, not just speaking skill.

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