

The Impact of Drama-Based Teaching on Children's English Language Learning

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Abstract: *Drama-based teaching is an innovative pedagogical approach that integrates dramatic techniques and elements into educational activities, enabling learners to achieve their learning objectives through immersive participation in dramatic practice. Drawing on relevant theoretical frameworks, this study systematically examines the multidimensional impact of drama-based teaching on children's English language learning. The findings indicate that drama-based teaching can effectively enhance children's English language and non-linguistic skills. The study further identifies the key challenges hindering the widespread implementation of drama-based teaching in children's English education and proposes corresponding strategies for improvement, including the establishment of systematic teacher training programs, the development of a diverse repository of teaching resources, the refinement of classroom management and multi-dimensional assessment mechanisms, the deepening of interdisciplinary and intercultural integration, and the strengthening of home-school collaboration. It is hoped that this study will provide theoretical insights and practical guidance for the reform of English language education for children and the promotion of drama-based teaching within the global educational context.*

Keywords: *Drama-Based Teaching; Children's English Learning; Language Proficiency; Socio-Emotional Development; Cross-Cultural Awareness*

1. Introduction

In the context of globalization, English language education for children has evolved from a focus on rote memorization of vocabulary and grammar to the cultivation of comprehensive language application abilities and holistic development. Traditional teacher-centered English teaching methods often lead to low student engagement, high language anxiety, and a disconnect between language learning and real-life application. In response to these limitations, drama-based teaching has emerged as a promising learner-centered approach that has gained increasing attention in language education worldwide. Drama-based teaching transforms the classroom into a dynamic, interactive space where children engage in role-playing, improvisation, script performance, and collaborative scene creation. Unlike traditional instruction, it situates language learning in authentic, meaningful contexts, allowing children to use English as a tool for communication rather than a set of abstract rules.

This study aims to address this gap by systematically analyzing the impacts of drama-based teaching on children's English learning. Specifically, it seeks to: (1) elaborate the theoretical foundations that underpin the effectiveness of drama-based teaching in second language acquisition; (2) examine its multifaceted effects on both linguistic and non-linguistic competencies of young English learners; (3) identify the key challenges faced by educators in implementing drama-based teaching; and (4) propose evidence-based strategies to optimize its practice. The findings of this study contribute to the growing body of research on drama in language education and provide actionable recommendations for teachers, curriculum developers, and educational policymakers seeking to enhance the quality of children's English education.

2. Basic Concepts of Drama-Based Teaching

2.1 Theoretical Foundations of Drama-Based Teaching

Drama teaching is validated by educational theories such as Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development, which promotes interactive learning^[1], Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis, which advocates for low-anxiety settings^[2] and Gardner's Multiple Intelligences Theory^[3], which recognizes

drama's comprehensive advantages, and constructivist theory, which emphasizes active, experiential learning^[4]. These theories collectively confirm the effectiveness of drama in education.

2.2 Definition of Drama-Based Teaching

Drama-in-Education, developed by Dorothy Heathcote, is a teaching method that uses drama activities to get students actively involved in lessons. The approach helps boost creativity, teamwork and participation, making classes more engaging and effective^[5]. Researchers have found that drama techniques can be used across different subjects to support not just academic learning, but also emotional growth and artistic development through hands-on activities and group discussions^{[6][7]}.

What makes drama teaching special is that it serves two purposes at once, since it's both an art form and a teaching tool. This dual nature allows teachers to create unique learning experiences that connect different subject areas^[8]. From a psychological perspective, drama teaching goes beyond simple play. Teachers use their voices and movements to create imaginary scenarios, helping students learn through personal experience and social interaction^[9].

2.3 Methods of Drama-Based Teaching

There are many different methods of drama teaching, which can help us achieve a variety of educational purposes. Researcher Feng Wen notes that this method of situational teaching works especially for foreign students who learn English. As this method will design some real-world scenes, students can practice English in these environments that are very close to life. When students take on character roles and repeatedly practice dialogues, they don't just improve their language skills, but also develop emotionally and form positive attitudes and values through the experience^[10]. Weng Qinlu notes that the communicative teaching method, focused on actual communication and the reproduction of the communication process, can be effectively realized through drama playwriting, developing students' communicative skills and aligning with the Chinese educational context^[11]. Gong He's research presents an exciting new approach to preschool drama education. This mode integrates drama performance and multimedia technology well, which moves beyond traditional teaching methods to create more engaging and multi-sensory learning experiences^[12]. Specifically, the technology not only allows children to play with the content of the course instead of passively sitting and listening, but also lets them participate in the classroom, so that the class becomes particularly interesting, and the whole classroom is active.

In conclusion, the different methods provide a rich reference for the research and implementation of drama teaching, and at the same time make the drama teaching classroom more vivid and interesting.

3. Impacts of Drama-Based Teaching on Children's English Learning

Drama teaching is a particularly useful teaching method that helps children learn English better. In this way, children can improve their English and develop them well in other ways. This method of teaching is very helpful for language learning, and it can also develop other important skills in children, so that they can make progress in many aspects. Zahid and Rohi emphasize that drama teaching improves children's English language learning by enhancing expressive language skills such as fluency, accuracy, and vocabulary through real-life scenarios^[13]. This method can also help students learn how to cooperate with others, exercise the ability to speak and communicate, which also has a great impact on the psychology of personal emotional intelligence and empathy, so that students can be more enthusiastic and motivated to learn foreign languages. Through the performance of drama, students can play their imagination, learn to think in creative ways, and also enhance self-confidence, and find opportunities to use foreign languages in real life.

From the perspective of the importance of drama teaching to language teaching, Chi Xiabing and Dong Beifei discuss how educational drama meets the demands of interdisciplinary teaching, promotes connections between disciplines, creates authentic contexts, and develops comprehensive literacy^[14]. Zhang Shengquan and Zhang Xiaohua explore teaching strategies and the integration of educational drama with subject teaching^{[15][16]}. Bessadet and Fleming examine the benefits of drama techniques in English teaching and the concept of language play^{[17][18]}. From the perspective of the importance of drama teaching to students' non-verbal ability, Yang Liu, Zhang Yin, and Yu Wei emphasize the role of drama in enhancing active learning and social engagement^[19]. Li Yingning proposes a basic theory of educational drama, focusing on its core values and functions^[20]. Lu Jiaying, Li Xiaowen, and Su Jing

discuss the role of educational drama in developing psychological potential^[21].

The research clearly shows that drama teaching helps students grow in many important ways including overall development, learning motivation, social skills and so on. This evidence emphasizes why drama techniques are so valuable in education today.

4. Challenges in the Implementation of Children's English Drama Teaching

4.1 Insufficient Teacher Professional Competence

The most significant challenge facing the implementation of drama-based teaching is the lack of teachers with specialized training in both English language teaching and drama pedagogy. Most English teachers have received training in traditional language teaching methods but have little or no experience in drama techniques such as improvisation, role-playing, and scriptwriting. This makes it difficult for them to design and implement effective drama activities, and they often struggle to balance student engagement with language learning objectives. In addition, many teachers lack the confidence to lead drama classes, as they feel unprepared to manage the dynamic and unpredictable nature of drama activities.

4.2 Limited Teaching Resources and Classroom Time

Another major challenge is the shortage of high-quality teaching resources and limited classroom time. There is a lack of age-appropriate English drama scripts that are tailored to the language level and interests of Chinese children. Most available scripts are either too difficult for young learners or contain cultural content that is unfamiliar to Chinese children. In addition, teachers often lack access to props, costumes, and audio-visual materials that are essential for creating immersive drama experiences. Furthermore, the limited time allocated to English classes in most primary schools makes it difficult for teachers to fully develop drama activities and achieve optimal rehearsal effects.

4.3 Inadequate Classroom Management and Assessment Systems

Classroom management is more challenging in drama-based classes than in traditional English classes. Lively drama activities can easily lead to noise and disruption, and teachers may struggle to maintain classroom order while keeping students engaged. In addition, there is a risk that teachers may focus too much on the performance aspect of drama and neglect the teaching of language accuracy. Another challenge is the lack of standardized assessment systems to evaluate the effectiveness of drama-based teaching. Traditional assessment methods such as written tests are not suitable for measuring the non-linguistic benefits of drama-based teaching, such as teamwork, creativity, and self-confidence. This makes it difficult for teachers to track student progress and for schools to justify the inclusion of drama-based teaching in the curriculum.

4.4 Insufficient Depth of Cultural Integration

While drama-based teaching has the potential to develop children's cross-cultural awareness, many current drama programs fail to integrate cultural content in a meaningful way. Most teachers simply introduce basic cultural facts related to the script, such as Western food or festivals, without providing deeper insights into the cultural values and beliefs that underlie these practices. In addition, there is a lack of drama scripts that explore cross-cultural themes or compare Chinese and Western cultures, which limits children's ability to develop a critical understanding of cultural differences.

5. Optimization Strategies for Children's English Drama Teaching

5.1 Build a Systematic Teacher Training System

To address the issue of insufficient teacher professional competence, educational institutions should establish a systematic training program for English teachers that combines language teaching methodology with drama pedagogy. The training program should include courses on dramatic techniques, script-writing, classroom management, and assessment methods for drama-based teaching. In addition, teachers should be provided with opportunities to observe experienced drama teachers in

action and participate in hands-on workshops to practice their skills. Schools can also encourage collaboration between English teachers and drama teachers, allowing them to share their expertise and co-teach drama classes.

5.2 Develop a Diversified Teaching Resource Library

Educational publishers and curriculum developers should create a diversified library of teaching resources for children's English drama teaching. This should include age-appropriate scripts that are tailored to the language level and interests of Chinese children, as well as supporting materials such as props, costumes, audio-visual aids, and lesson plans. The scripts should cover a variety of themes, including daily life, fairy tales, and cross-cultural stories, and should be designed to integrate language learning with cultural education. In addition, digital platforms can be used to share teaching resources and provide teachers with access to online training courses and community forums.

5.3 Improve Classroom Management and Multi-Dimensional Assessment Mechanisms

Teachers should develop effective classroom management strategies to maintain order in drama classes while keeping students engaged. This can include establishing clear rules and expectations for behavior, using positive reinforcement to encourage good behavior, and designing structured activities that keep students focused. In addition, a multi-dimensional assessment system should be developed to evaluate the effectiveness of drama-based teaching. This system should include both formative and summative assessments, and should measure not only linguistic skills but also non-linguistic competencies such as teamwork, creativity, and self-confidence. Assessment methods can include observation checklists, student self-assessments, peer assessments, and performance portfolios.

5.4 Deepen Interdisciplinary and Cross-Cultural Integration

Drama-based teaching should be integrated with other subjects such as art, music, and social studies to create interdisciplinary learning experiences. This can enrich the content of drama classes and enhance students' understanding of different subjects. In addition, teachers should deepen the integration of cultural content into drama lessons by providing students with opportunities to explore different cultures and compare them with their own. This can include activities such as cultural research projects, cross-cultural role-plays, and the performance of dramas from different cultural traditions.

5.5 Strengthen Home-School Collaboration

Home-school collaboration is essential for the success of drama-based teaching. Schools should communicate regularly with parents to inform them about the benefits of drama-based teaching and involve them in their children's learning. This can include organizing parent-child drama workshops, inviting parents to attend performances, and providing parents with resources to support their children's English learning at home. By working together, schools and parents can create a supportive learning environment that maximizes the benefits of drama-based teaching for children's English learning and holistic development.

6. Conclusion

This study has systematically examined the impact of drama-based teaching on children's English language learning, drawing on theoretical foundations and empirical evidence from existing research. The findings demonstrate that drama-based teaching is a highly effective pedagogical approach that enhances children's English language proficiency by stimulating learning interest, improving oral expression, facilitating vocabulary acquisition, and strengthening listening comprehension. In addition, it fosters critical non-linguistic competencies including teamwork, creativity, self-confidence, social communication abilities, and cross-cultural awareness, aligning with the goals of holistic education.

Despite its many benefits, the implementation of drama-based teaching in children's English education faces several core challenges, including insufficient teacher professional competence, limited teaching resources and classroom time, inadequate classroom management and assessment systems, and insufficient depth of cultural integration. To address these challenges, this study proposes a series of optimization strategies, including building a systematic teacher training system, developing a

diversified teaching resource library, improving classroom management and multi-dimensional assessment mechanisms, deepening interdisciplinary and cross-cultural integration, and strengthening home-school collaboration.

This study has some limitations that should be acknowledged. First, it is based on existing research and does not include original empirical data from a large-scale study. Second, it does not examine the long-term effects of drama-based teaching on children's English learning and academic achievement. Future research should conduct longitudinal studies to investigate the sustained impact of drama-based teaching and develop standardized assessment tools to measure its effectiveness more accurately. In addition, further research is needed to explore the application of drama-based teaching in different educational contexts and its integration with emerging technologies such as virtual reality and artificial intelligence.

Overall, drama-based teaching has enormous potential to transform children's English education by creating engaging, student-centered learning experiences that develop both linguistic and non-linguistic competencies. With proper support and implementation, it can become an integral part of the English curriculum, helping children become confident, competent, and culturally aware English language learners.

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