

# Learning English through Drama-Based Approach (DBA): A Pedagogical Stylistic Experiment with Pygmalion

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## ABSTRACT

*This study explores the effectiveness of using a new approach called drama-based approach in helping to learn English language. This approach was pioneered by Dorothy Heathcote in 1950. Heathcote, a drama teacher, developed this technique to help young children communicate confidently in English. In this research, the same theatrical method is employed to enhance students' spoken English skills. The chosen medium for the dramatic activity is George Bernard Shaw's play Pygmalion (1916), focusing on selected passages relevant to English language learning. The research incorporates both qualitative and quantitative methods, demanding active participation from students in the play. They engaged by taking on various roles of characters, as opposed to being passive listeners under a teacher's direction. This research took place in Dera Ismail Khan at Government College No. 1, involving 5th semester students who were divided into two groups: a control group and an experimental group. The experimental group performed the play through role-play and dialogue reading, while the control group read the play through traditional methods without any active engagement. The experimental study unfolded in three stages: a questionnaire, an intervention combined with improvisation, and an exam. Results were statistically measured and compared across both groups. The experimental group outperformed the control group in spoken English, demonstrating that a drama-based approach effectively facilitates the students in learning English language. This method allowed students to easily grasp themes, central message, linguistic elements, and character relationships, enhancing their understanding as well as their accents. The heightened engagement and enjoyment expressed by the students indicated a positive reception of this learning activity.*

## KEYWORDS:

theatrical activity, control group, experimental group, intervention, improvisation, linguistic elements

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## BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

English plays a central role as the second most widely spoken and influential language in Pakistan. To communicate effectively, it is essential to have a strong grasp of the language. However, for students in Pakistani educational institutions, achieving fluency in English can be challenging due to limited opportunities for practice and an emphasis on speaking English (Ali, Khizar, Yaqub, Afzaal, and Shahid, 2020; Bilal, Ahmad, and Lodhi, 2024). The traditional teaching methods used in schools, colleges, and universities often fall short; they tend to prioritize rote memorization of rules and principles over practical speaking skills. Classes are largely lecture-based, with students rarely participating in discussions often only engaging during exams. This focus on rote learning not only stifles language competency but also leads to disengagement among students. Various methods for teaching English have been introduced over time, such as the direct method, classical method like using grammar in teaching English language and learning through listening to an audio etc. However, these approaches often fail to spark genuine interest in students.

Recently, a new technique called pedagogical stylistics has gained traction. This approach emphasizes the relationship between teachers and students and focuses on how students learn through interaction and engagement with various groups and resources. Pedagogical stylistics connects closely with language use and text interpretation. It encourages students to explore their creativity and understand how writers shape their materials and convey meaning. This method has been highlighted by educators since Widdowson in (1975), with further developments by Carter, Short, and others in the 1980s. It has also been discussed in Text World Theory by Werth and Gavins in the late (1990s) and early (2000s). Ultimately, this model not only enhances students' understanding of the link between text and reader but also boosts their appreciation of the stylistic features within literature.

Students should familiarize themselves with various stylistic elements present in texts, as this will help them appreciate the significance of the author's sentence structure. Every writer has a unique style that sets them apart, which



is essential for understanding their work. Pedagogical stylistics plays a crucial role by introducing students to the author's writing style, including their choice of words, thematic elements, and underlying concepts. This approach can be broken down into three stages: before, during, and after reading, thus integrating both literature and language. It also enhances students' grammatical skills and enables them to recognize the differences between literary and colloquial language.

Collie and Slater (1990) highlight four reasons why incorporating literature into the classroom is beneficial for students:

- Language enrichment
- Personal and active involvement
- Use of authentic materials (such as texts)

Another effective method for teaching English is the drama-based approach, first introduced by British drama teacher Dorothy Heathcote in 1950. This technique aims to enhance spoken English skills.

Mason and Krashen (2004) suggest that learning English through literature is far superior to traditional teaching methods. They argue that literature encompasses universal themes that resonate with human psychology, allowing learners to acquire various language features from texts and apply them practically in their interactions with others.

## Objectives of the Study

1. To evaluate the effectiveness of using Drama-based approach in teaching English language through the play *Pygmalion* (1912) in comparison to traditional teaching methods, particularly regarding student learning outcomes.
2. To analyze behavior and spoken English of students during this DBA through role-playing activities.
3. To notice the differences in results between an experimental group and a control group.

## Research Questions

1. In what ways does employing a drama-based approach (DBA) in teaching English through the play *Pygmalion* (1912) enhance students' learning outcomes when compared to conventional methods?
2. How does this approach influence students' motivation and engagement in their English language learning journey?
3. Are the outcomes significantly different between the control group utilizing this approach and the experimental group?

## Significance of the Study

Students can learn English through adopting different strategies. Taking part in drama can help students deal with shyness, anxiety and nervousness. It will remove the fear of being in front of an audience and also help them understand the significance of teamwork. Instead of reading the play, it is a good idea to assign each student a character in the play and get them involved in acting it out. Not only do they improve their English, but they also gain enough confidence to speak in front of an audience during presentations, group lessons and discussions.

When students engage with the play *Pygmalion* (1912), especially with their classmates, they gain a better understanding of the story and become more interested in it. Speaking English fluently is important, but appearance and verbal confabulation also matters a lot. It is a well-known Chinese proverb: "When I read, I forget, when I watch, I remember but when I am involved, I learn and understand." This applies to students as well. When they get involved in the play and start relating to the characters, they understand the themes, ideas, and deeper meanings of the dialogues. They also learn to analyze the characters better in exams. Throughout this process, their confidence grows, their hesitation in speaking decreases, and their pronunciation improves over time.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

A well-known person (Courtney, 1980) sharing his viewpoints about drama as "the process whereby our imaginations become action, drama is all about ensuring affinity and recognition that leads to extraneous impression" (p.7). Moreover, he appoints that drama portray actual life because the learners (students) actively involve themselves in the dynamic process and acquire knowledge of something new. They take the roles of fictional characters in the drama and begin to act according to the personality of those characters.

In addition to (Hill, 1986), he supports the notion that one of the primary goals of plays or literature is to pique students' interest, particularly in learning English. Additionally, it will encourage students to completely engage on all levels, emotionally, cognitively, and physically. He supports this by saying that it greatly helps students in speaking the language correctly without any hesitation, as well as in developing their personalities and cognitive capacities.

To further elucidate the idea of a drama-based approach, (Davies, 1990a) ,(Davies, 1990b) presents his perspective on drama, stating that the instructor or mentor should assess each student's interest and linguistic style before selecting an appropriate text. It should then be broken down into phases, including the script, text interpretation, rehearsal, and the actual action. Students of all ages can benefit from this approach if the teacher can keep the classroom's

atmosphere sound, healthy and pleasant while attending to all of the students' needs, interests, and motivations. He goes on to say that students must be eager, confident, and actively involved before engaging in a drama-based activity.

According to (Dodson, 2000), a professor and drama educator, the communicative approach to language instruction enables students to utilize language to solve problems and express true meaning. Drama is a communicative approach to language acquisition since it is purpose-driven and student-centered. She adds that theater-related activities allow students to use language in authentic ways. From role-playing and improvisation to reading and interpretation, the authentic classroom drama performance incorporates a range of activities that foster fluency. Finally, in order to solve problems in the target language, the plays require careful attention to language and pronunciation.

Drama entails both acting and learning simultaneously. The advantage of theatrical activities, according to (Phillips, 2003), is that shy or reserved students adapt into the character, giving them a new appearance that enables them to engage in such activities and express themselves more freely. Unlike repeated exercises, this customized element of drama gives the language learning process more significance and memorability.

According to the writers (Clanfield and Duncan, 2005), students benefit greatly from literature since it introduces them to many regional and social languages and the vocabulary used in the text. It encourages communal contact. Those Students who acquire the target language naturally fall within the sociolinguistics category, which is the study and analysis of a language according to social characteristics such as gender, class, race, and religion.

(Bataineh, Al-Rabadi, and Smadi, 2013) investigated the effects of literature on students' performance in oral and written communication exercises. Utilizing a range of quantitative and qualitative techniques (including questionnaires, interviews, analysis, and role-play), they discovered notable yet dramatic improvements in students' communicative ability, favoring literature-based instruction.

(Garcia, 2017) asserts that using dramatic strategies like role reversal and scene enactment can significantly enhance the pedagogical viewpoint in language instruction. These methods give students the chance to practice their language skills in a context-relevant and meaningful way. By giving students other methods of language acquisition outside of the conventional classroom, the employment of such theatrical techniques can significantly improve the language learning process.

Examining the perks of drama-based activities, (Zakhareuski, 2018) strongly advocates for the inclusion of theater in English language classes, emphasizing that speaking anxiety is decreased and learners' self-confidence is increased through acting. She added that regardless of a student's intellectual or educational background, drama fosters a focused, safe, and trustworthy environment. Pupils utilize expressive language more freely and are less worried about fluency errors (Doan, 2024). Language barriers are broken down and learners are exposed to a variety of language registers and their applications through the enactment of stories. It results in a deeper and more significant educational experience (Coyle and Meyer, 2021; SWARGIARY, 2024).

Drama in English language lessons can significantly enhance students' language proficiency, according to (Agboola, 2020). Drama activities encourage students to participate actively and communicate effectively by creating a more engaging, interactive, and supportive learning environment (Jefferies, Glew, Karhani, McNally, and Ramjan, 2021; Wongsu and Son, 2022). These activities, in his opinion, allow students to be creative, utilize language in authentic contexts, and gain knowledge of many cultures. This allows students to improve their English communication skills.

Additionally, (Kumar, Qasim, Mansur, and Shah, 2022) supports the notion that students' fluency in spoken English is improved when dramatic approaches are used. Students can overcome their shyness and utter sentences with more confidence when they participate in drama-based activities. It helps the students retain all of the ideas in their minds.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study used a mixed-methods research approach, collecting and analyzing data using both qualitative and quantitative techniques.

### Participants

Twelve 5th semester BS English students from Government College No. 1 D. I. Khan are this study's participants. They were divided into two groups randomly: six students were included in the experimental group, while another six students were included in the control group. The researcher has received all required consent from the teacher as well as the students (Klykken, 2022).

The study was carried out in three stages: questionnaires, intervention and improvisation, exam.

- **Questionnaires:** to check students' understanding of the play as well as the playwright
- **Intervention plus Improvisation:** to check the confidence, pronunciation and spoken English of the students
- **Exam:** to check the effectiveness as well as the validity of drama-based approach in learning English language after utilizing this on students.

## Preparation and Rehearsal

Before performing this activity, the entire class was divided into two groups:

- Experimental group
- Control group

## Inferential and Descriptive Statistical Research Methods

- Inferential statistical research method was used on target group.
- Descriptive statistical research method was used on those specific students in experimental group who have enhanced themselves in spoken language.

## Statistical Techniques for Comparing the Experimental and Control Groups

The statistical techniques used to compare the experimental and control group were mean, median, mode and standard deviation. These statistical tools have been used to infer the results.

## Delimitations of the Study

The study focuses on using drama-based activity to teach English language through George Bernard Shaw's play *Pygmalion* (1912). Furthermore, the research was conducted at a single institution, Government College No. 1 (department of English, 5th semester) in Dera Ismail Khan.

## ANALYSIS

### Division of the Class into Control group and Experimental Group

The class was split into two groups: experimental group and control group, each consisting of six students (male and female) in order to continue this action-based study.

### Students in Control Group

Sumiya, Hasnain, Zarah, Zakir, Maria, Tahir (5th semester).

Three girls and three boys were included in the control group.

### Students in Experimental Group

Tanzeel, Mehwish, Rahim, Ghina, Nouman, Farwa (5th semester).

Similarly, three girls and three boys were also included in the experimental group.

### 1st Stage: Statistical Result of Experimental Group (Questionnaires)

Students	Mean	Median	Mode	S Deviation
Tanzeel	0.8	0.5	1	0.0017
Mehwish	0.85	1	1	0.00221
Rahim	0.9	1	1	0.001
Ghina	0.85	1	1	0.00017
Farwa	0.8	1	1	0.0015
Nouman	0.7	0.5	1	0.00229

### Statistical Result of Control Group (Questionnaires)

Students	Mean	Median	Mode	S. Deviation
Sumiya	0.75	0.5	1	0.0029
Hasnain	0.5	1	1	0.0025
Zarah	0.9	1	1	0.0015
Zakir	0.85	0.5	1	0.0023
Maria	0.7	0.5	1	0.00229
Tahir	0.8	1	1	0.002

The statistical explanation of mean, median, mode and standard deviation of both groups shows the similar response (Setiawan and Sukoco, 2021). The researcher distributed the questionnaires to both groups before performing the Drama-Based Approach (DBA) for comparing the results of the two groups before and after using DBA. Mostly students in both groups have given positive responses in questionnaires that contained closed ended questions. No variation has been observed in the results of both groups.

## 2nd Stage: Intervention and Improvisation

(Analyzing the spoken English of Experimental group During the Drama-Based Activity)

**Intervention:** For practice, students in the experimental group read the chosen passages from the play straight from the text in their hands.

**Improvisation:** As in a role-play, students read the chosen passages from the play. They spoke as though they were acting out a real play in front of the control group.

Students	Reading Skills	Pronunciation	Confidence
Tanzeel	Excellent	Excellent	Amazing
Mehwish	Good	Good	Amazing
Rahim	Average	Good	Good
Ghina	Excellent	Average	Good
Nouman	Good	Excellent	Amazing
Farwa	Good	Average	Good

## 3rd Stage: Exam (Statistical Difference Between the Results of Control and Experimental Group)

In order to determine whether this drama-based exercise was beneficial for English language learning, the researcher administered tests to both the experimental and control groups. The following is the exam question that was taken from Pygmalion (1916):

**Q. Q. When it comes to shaping character and behavior, the environment is the most significant factor. Talk about it in relation to Pygmalion.**

Here are the results of both groups:

### Control Group

Students	Mean	Median	Mode
Sumiya, Hasnain, Zarah, Zakir, Tahir, Maria	6.3	6	6

**Table 1:** Number of 6 Students

### Experimental Group

Students	Mean	Median	Mode
Tanzeel, Mehwish, Rahim, Ghina, Farwa, Nouman	8	8	8

**Table 2:** Number of 6 Students

## MEAN (AVERAGE SCORE)

- Control Group Mean: 6.3
- Experimental Group Mean: 8
- The average score for the control group is 6.3, which suggests that the students had an average understanding of the question.
- The average score for the experimental group is 8, which is higher than the control group. This indicates that students who were taught using a drama-based approach performed much better in answering the question. It suggests that the drama-based approach helped them understand the material more deeply.

## MEDIAN (MIDDLE VALUE OR HALF NUMBER OF RESPONSES)

- Control Group Median: 6
- Experimental Group Median: 8
- The median is the middle value and response of half number of students. For the control group, the middle score is 6, showing that most students gave responses around that score. The group's answers were somewhat satisfactory, but not necessarily very high.
- The experimental group has a median of 8, which shows that the majority of students in this group scored higher than the control group. This suggests that most students in the experimental group gave more detailed responses, indicating a better understanding of the question after engaging with the drama-based learning method.

## MODE (MOST FREQUENT RESPONSE)

- Control Group Mode: 6
- Experimental Group Mode: 8
- The mode is the most frequent score in the group. In the control group, the most frequent score is 6, indicating that many students gave answers around the same level, which were again satisfactory but not outstanding.
- In the experimental group, the most frequent score is 8, showing that the drama-based approach helped a lot of students perform at a higher level. More students in this group gave stronger answers, meaning the approach had a positive effect on their ability to express their thoughts and concepts clearly.

## CONCLUSION

The drama-based approach in the experimental group helped students engage more deeply with the question and the play *Pygmalion*, resulting in better performance compared to the control group. This method seems to have provided a more effective learning experience, helping students to understand ideas more thoroughly, especially around themes like the influence of environment on character and behavior.

## RECOMMENDATION OF THE STUDY

There are many different ways to learn English, but the key is figuring out which one student find most appealing. The researcher strongly suggests the drama-based strategy because it enhances:

- Students' ability to pronounce words correctly
- overcome their reluctance to speak in front of the class
- gains confidence
- facilitate peer discussion
- increase student-teacher engagement
- improves spoken English
- analyzing body language of the students

This approach ought to be used in all institutions, particularly in the department of English. Compared to theoretical learning, students gain more knowledge from practical experience. With this approach, every student in the class is actively involved.

## CREDIT AUTHOR STATEMENT

**Shahzadi Sarah:** Conceptualization, Methodology, Data curation, Writing- Original draft preparation. **Dr. Abdul Qayyum** Visualization, Investigation, Validation, Reviewing and Editing.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST:

The author declares that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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