Using Drama-Based Projects To Enhance 6th Graders' Speaking Skills At A Secondary School

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Abstract:

Background: Speaking techniques are many, but choosing the most suitable techniques for students is not an easy task. One of the solutions that teachers often choose to use to develop students' speaking skills is drama. Dramatic speaking is a speaking method that does not constrain the speaker like other speaking teaching methods, the learner can imagine a specific context to speak, this teaching method encourages learners to speak confidently, and teachers participate in correcting pronunciation when students pronounce incorrectly, helping learners enhance their speaking skills effectively. This study aims to examine the improvement of speaking skills in aspects including confidence, fluency, and accuracy, and to investigate the change in attitudes of grade 6A students at Kim Thuong Lower Secondary School (35 students) through the intervention teaching model using drama-based projects.

Materials and Methods: The study applies the action intervention model design. Students participate in collaborative learning exercises through drama projects, including role-playing, improvisation, and drama scripts. Speaking ability is assessed through pre-, progress-, and post-tests, which are designed specifically to evaluate the process of enhancing speaking skills based on confidence, fluency, and accuracy. Additional data are collected through a survey questionnaire on students' attitudes after completing the intervention, including three assessment components: affective, cognitive, and behavioral.

Results: The results showed that students participating in speaking skill enhancement exercises achieved an average improvement from 5.77 to 7.34. The questionnaire data indicated that students' attitudes were positive when engaging in speaking enhancement activities based on drama learning projects. Specifically, 100% of students agreed or strongly agreed that their speaking skills had enhanced. They reported being more confident when speaking in front of a crowd, speaking more fluently, and expressing ideas more accurately. For the emotional component, students felt less stressed and pressured when participating in class. Their behavior was also positive, showing a desire for teachers to continue using this teaching method in the future.

Conclusion: The study explores the potential of expanding the development of other skills through drama projects, such as writing, listening, and reading, thereby helping students to supplement their language skills in various aspects, including vocabulary, structure, and pronunciation, and to build confidence when engaging in the process of developing a second language.

Key Word: Drama-based project; Speaking skills; Action research; Effectiveness; Attitudes.

I. Introduction

Drama-based was commonly used in teaching in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Before approaching this teaching method in the early stages it was quite simple "The Dramatic Method of Teaching, The Play Way, Child Play, and Creative Drama" (Even, 2013, pp. 303-304). To support the process of enhancing learners' speaking skills, teaching methods play a leading role. According to Dawson and Lee (2018) Drama – based is a pedagogical method used by teachers in the process of organizing practical teaching, through scenarios creatively built by learners, helping learners develop speaking skills based on real situations or previously built situations. Drama-based teaching method also helps learners enhance their teamwork spirit, learners know how to listen and correct individual mistakes during speaking (Fauzan, 2016). The approach to developing learners when participating in project-based learning based on Drama – based is dialogue, learner interaction is expressed through communication actions between learners in the same group. This teaching model conveys to learners "provides contexts for multiple language encounters and encourages authentic dialogue between teachers and students" (Kao & O'Neill, 1988, p.1).Therefore, many teachers today have taken advantage of drama-based teaching to develop students' speaking skills "to describe a specific approach that used drama techniques to teach" (Dawson & Lee, 2018, p. 1). For students who are not majoring in foreign

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languages, they have encountered many difficulties in speaking and expressing ideas to listeners. According to Supriya (2018) emphasized that based on classroom action research, Drama - based is a teaching method that contributes positively to enhancing learners' speaking skills. These findings are also agreed by Tseng (2018) that not only does Drama-based enhance learners' language skills but also significantly changes their cognitive attitudes, their confidence when speaking in front of a crowd, and their emotional aspects, which also relieves pressure and stress when participating in class. Based on the above findings, it can be seen that Drama-based is a teaching method widely applied at all levels from primary to high school today, to enhance learners' English speaking skill.

At Kim Thuong Secondary school where the researcher teaches, according to the input results of 6th grade students, the English proficiency of students is at the threshold of 5-6 points, which is the common score that students achieve. Through the process of conducting some mid-term speaking tests, the students' scores also fell within the range of 5 - 6 points with more than 2/3 of the students in the class. Furthermore, the researcher's teaching place is in an area with difficult economic conditions. Therefore, fostering a passion for cultivating vocabulary to improve communication accuracy, confidence, and fluency, in order to help learners enhance their speaking skills, is one of the challenges that both the school and the researcher are facing. English communication skills for students in economically disadvantaged areas pose a major obstacle, anxiety, and pressure for learners, which is a major issue to help learners overcome their fears and enhance their second language performance (Awan, Azher, Anwar & Naz 2010). Most students are still worried when having to speak in front of the class, many students are still shy because their voice and pronunciation are not standard or fluent. In addition, Tuan and Mai (2015) also pointed out that this difficulty is also influenced by the emotions and thoughts of the learner, so in the teaching process, teachers need to help students approach each different stage, helping learners to speak naturally, which language and speaking structure are important content that learners need to grasp.

The following research questions were addressed in the study:
(1) To what extent does the use of drama-based projects enhance English-speaking skills for 6th graders in Kim Thuong Lower Secondary School?
(2) What are the students' attitudes towards the use of drama in English speaking lessons?

II. Material And Methods

The researcher in this thesis applied Burns's (2010) model due to its relevance and practicality (see Figure 1). This model consisted of four phases: planning, acting, observing, and reflecting, with the "act" and "observe" stages combined to accommodate time and resource constraints. By following this four-stage cyclical process, teacher-researchers could gain valuable insights and implement meaningful changes in their teaching practice. In addition, the researcher decided to use this model because the researcher followed the three steps mentioned above in the implementation of the thesis. These steps are specified in Figure 1 below:
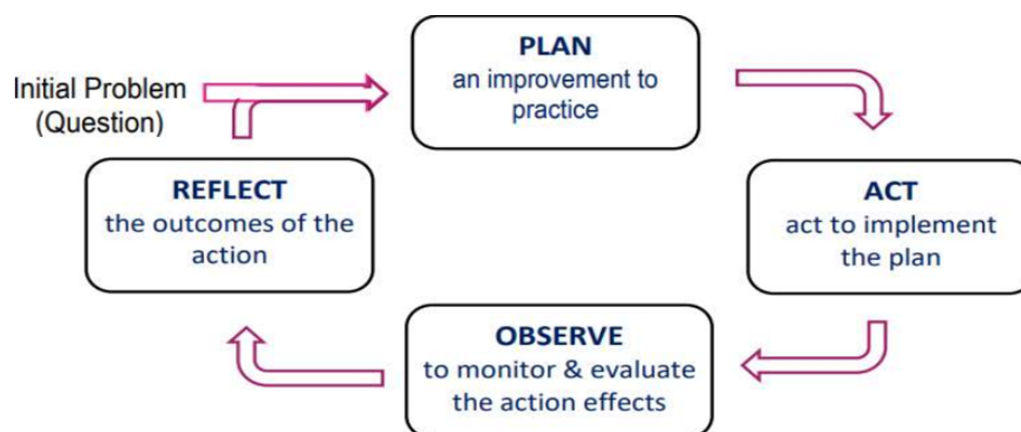

Figure 1: The 4-Stage Action Research Cycle by Burns (2010)

In the study, the researcher applied the experiment to grade 6, the first grade in Lower Secondary school, to enhance students' speaking skills and help them had more effective learning methods, reducing anxiety and fear when they approached a second language.

This study applied the Drama-based speaking lesson content according to the English textbooks required by the Vietnamese Ministry of Education and Training's National Foreign Language program. Students at this high school studied all subjects, among which English was a compulsory subject. The teaching

time for grade 6 was 3 periods per week. In the study, the researcher used the I Learn Smart World grade 6 English textbook series to develop the content of the English-speaking lesson topics based on drama.

The researcher randomly selected class 6A with 35 students (including 20 females and 15 males). Most students had been exposed to compulsory English since grade 3, according to Circular No. 32/2018/TT-BGDDT issued on December 26, 2018, by the Minister of Education and Training. However, they only focused on vocabulary and grammar, while some practical skills such as speaking were less emphasized. That was the reason why many of them had approximately a low intermediate level of English. For more information, the reason why the researcher chose the 6th-grade students as the subjects of the study was because the researcher taught secondary students who were very enthusiastic about participating in new methods.

III. Result
Results of the Drama-Based Project Intervention to Enhance Students' Speaking

The data results were used to compare the student scores achieved through the pre-test, three progress tests, and one post-test. The data results were collected as follows:

The reliability measurement results were based on the standard deviation of the data. According to Fraenkel et al., (2019), for test data measured by scores, standard deviation analysis data from SPSS could be used to reference the results. Accordingly, the dispersion level from 0–2.5 is reliable data, and data above 2.5 was unreliable when the dispersion was large.

Table 1. Comparison of test scores through the pre-test, progress test, and post-test.

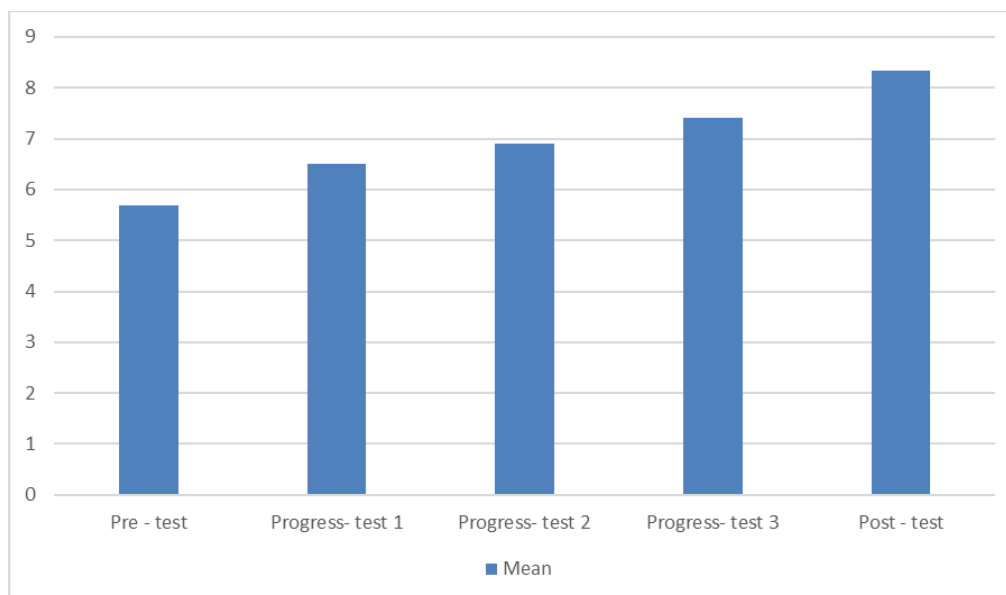|	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Pre – test	35	5.00	7.00	5.6857	.56990
Progress – test1	35	5.50	8.00	6.5143	.69118
Progress – test2	35	5.50	8.50	6.9143	.73250
Progress – test3	35	6.00	8.50	7.4143	.65849
Post - test	35	6.50	8.50	7.9000	.59161

Figure 1. Comparison of score data across pre-, progress-, and post-tests

Accordingly, the author calculated the frequency distribution of scores to analyze the changes in students' learning outcomes after applying the drama project intervention learning model. The results showed that the lowest scores achieved in the assessment tests were 5.5, 6.0, and 6.5, while the highest scores were 8.0 and 8.5. Although the scores did not increase significantly, they indicated the stability of the process of enhancing students' speaking skills through the drama-based speaking method. The students' mean scores increased positively across the pre- and post-intervention tests (5.69, 6.51, 6.91, 7.41, and 7.9), with SD < 1. This demonstrated that the results were due to the students' constant efforts with the new speaking method, through which they were able to develop aspects of speaking such as confidence, fluency, and accuracy.

To evaluate the improvement of speaking skills as mentioned in the thesis, the researcher provided teachers with a rubric for each scoring criterion before synthesizing the overall score. For example, a student

achieving a total score of 8.5/10 points corresponded to three criteria: confidence, fluency, and accuracy. Each criterion was allocated a maximum score of 4 points, 3 points, and 3 points, respectively. After these component scores were evaluated, they were synthesized into the overall score that the student achieved. This assessment aimed to compare the development of these skills before, during, and after the intervention of the drama-based speaking method. The results are presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Paired Samples Statistics about three features of students' speaking assessment

|	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Confidence Pre-test	35	1.00	2.00	1.4000	.49705
Confidence Progress- test1	35	2.00	2.50	2.2143	.25105
Confidence Progress- test2	35	2.00	3.00	2.5429	.32925
Confidence Progress- test3	35	2.50	3.50	2.8571	.25928
Confidence Post – test	35	3.00	3.50	3.2429	.25355
Fluency Pre – test	35	1.50	2.50	1.9143	.25684
Fluency Progress- test1	35	1.50	3.00	2.2000	.36782
Fluency Progress- test2	35	1.50	3.00	2.2429	.37123
Fluency Progress- test3	35	2.00	3.00	2.3429	.31556
Fluency Post – test	35	2.00	3.00	2.4286	.32410
Accuracy Pre-test	35	1.50	3.00	2.1286	.40842
Accuracy Progress- test1	35	1.50	3.00	2.2000	.40584
Accuracy Progress- test2	35	1.50	3.00	2.2571	.37123
Accuracy Progress- test3	35	1.50	3.00	2.3143	.38512
Accuracy Post- test	35	1.50	3.00	2.3143	.38512
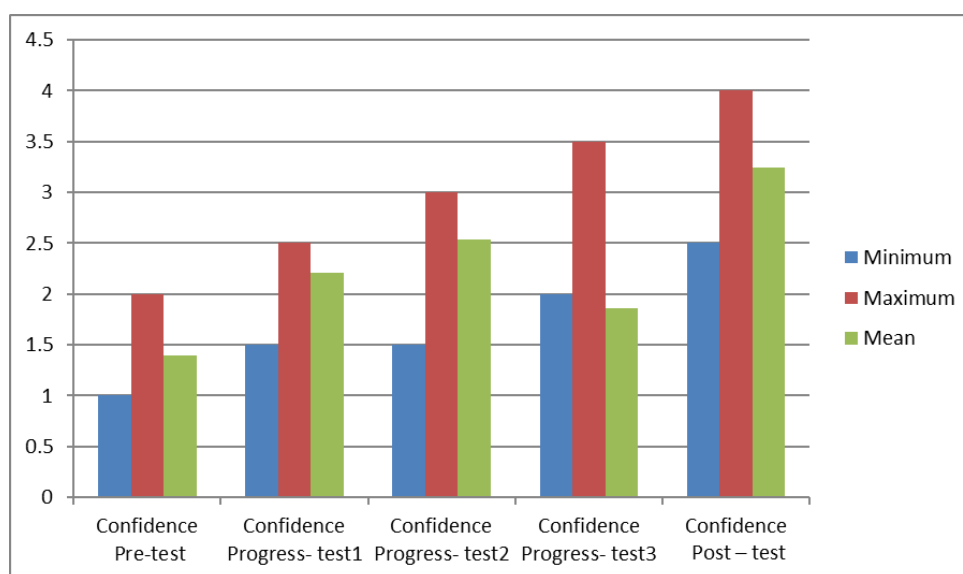
Figure 2. Comparison chart of results on confidence in participating in speaking activities: Pre-test, Progress Tests, and Post-test.

Through the above collected and surveyed results, the researcher found that significant changes in students' learning outcomes were reflected in similar data pairs, which were measured by scores corresponding to the criteria of confidence, fluency, and accuracy. Each criterion was evaluated with a maximum of 4, 3, and 3 points respectively. The results were collected as follows:

The confidence criterion before participating in the class had a minimum score of 1.0, a maximum of 2.0, a mean of 1.4, and a standard deviation (SD) of 0.5. After the intervention using drama-based projects in teaching, the progress-test scores showed significant enhancement from Progress Test 1 to Progress Test 3. The minimum scores ranged from 2.0 to 2.5, while the maximum scores ranged from 2.5 to 3.5, and the mean scores increased from 2.21 to 2.86. The final intervention test revealed a clear enhancement: the confidence criterion had a minimum score of 2.5, a maximum of 4.0, and a mean of 3.24. These results indicate that students became more confident when participating in speaking activities. They were no longer afraid of speaking in front of others, and the score for this criterion enhanced from 1.0 to 4.0 after completing the implementation of the action intervention model.
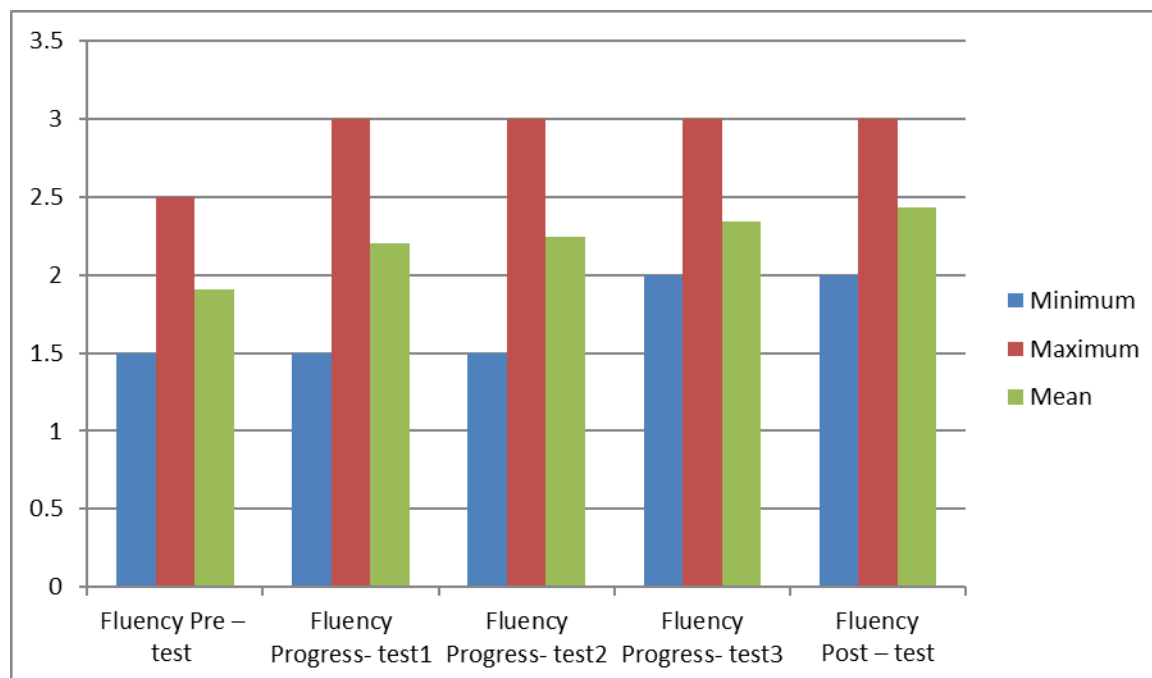
Figure 3. Comparison chart of fluency enhancement results in the Pre-test, Progress tests, and Post-test.

The fluency criterion also showed significant enhancement in students' results. Specifically, before the intervention, the pre-test scores ranged from a minimum of 1.5 to a maximum of 2.5, with a mean of 1.91. After the intervention, the maximum score increased to 3.0, and the mean showed noticeable enhancement across the three progress-test assessments, with scores of 2.20, 2.24, and 2.34, respectively. At the end of the intervention model, the students' scores ranged from a minimum of 2.0 to a maximum of 3.0, with a mean of 2.43.
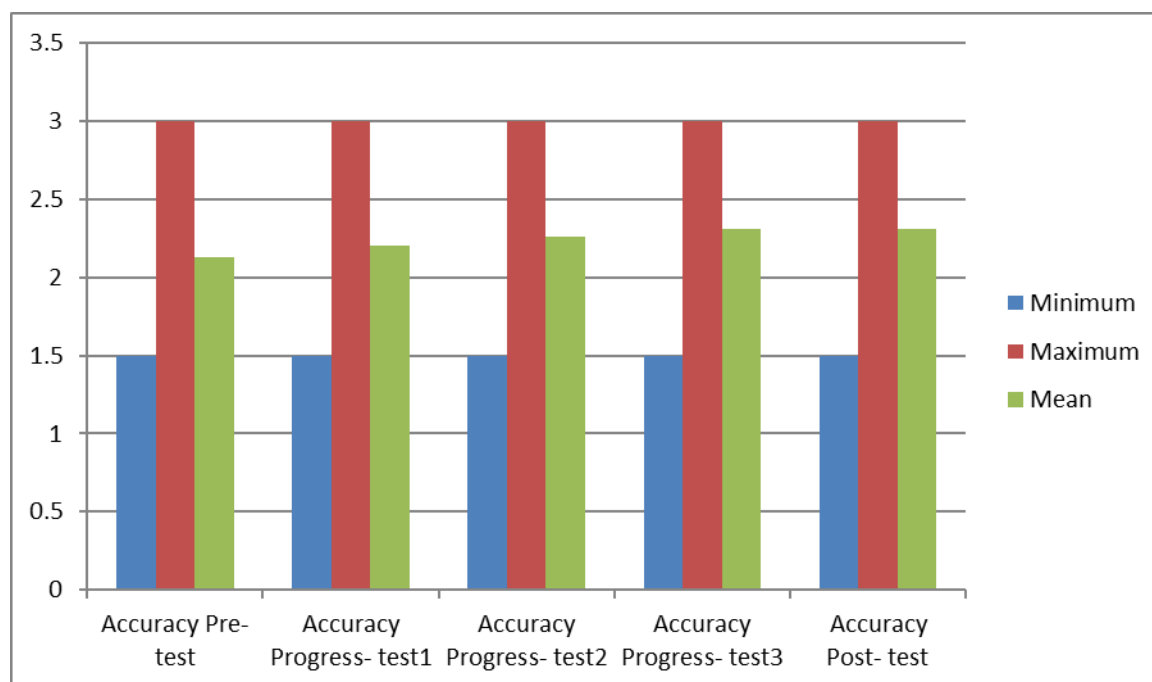

Figure 4. Comparison chart of accuracy criteria

Thus, through the rubric, accuracy criteria were measured, including 3 main factors: vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation. The researcher found that students had progressed in developing speaking skills in the form of drama. The results are reflected in a slight increase in the mean scores students achieved from the pre-test, to the progress-test, and the post-test, respectively, as follows: 2.12, 2.20, 2.26, and 2.31. This result reflects the change in accuracy in drama activities, showing that students can convey information more clearly

and accurately so that the receiver of the information can better understand the content that needs to be conveyed. To achieve this requires the process of acquiring vocabulary, accurately pronouncing words, and understanding the communication context in order to use sentence structures appropriate to the topic that needs to be dramatized.

Thus, based on the above results, we could see that, before the implementation of the action model intervention in teaching using drama-based projects, students had a fear of speaking in front of a crowd and had little interaction in speaking lessons, which led to many errors in fluency and accuracy in communication, and teachers had not yet detected or participated in adjusting students' speaking practice activities.

Data from the student questionnaire: the students' attitudes toward the use of drama in English speaking lessons.

After completing the implementation process, the researcher collected survey results on students' attitudes after completing the foreign language learning intervention using drama-based projects to enhance the speaking skills of 6A grade students at Kim Thuong Lower Secondary School. The evaluation results were collected for the purpose of evaluating the positive attitude changes of students during the speaking practice process. This survey result aimed to answer the second research question in the thesis content. The results were evaluated on a Likert scale from (1) to (5), specifically in the order of evaluation: Strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, strongly agree. The results are shown as follows:

Table 3. Students' attitudes towards using Drama-Based Projects in learning English speaking

	Statements	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Cognitive component	I feel a stronger motivation to speak English	0%	0%	0%	37.14%	62.86%
	I can develop my ideas, logically and easily	0%	0%	0%	27.71%	72.29%
	I feel my speaking skill has improved significantly	0%	0%	0%	28.57%	71.43%
	I feel more interested in learning to speak English.	0%	0%	0%	14.29%	85.71%
	I do not feel anxious	0%	0%	0%	31.43%	68.57%
	I am still afraid of making mistakes, and I feel shy when speaking	0%	0%	0%	14.29%	85.71%
	I can pronounce better.	0%	0%	0%	14.29%	85.71%
	I can enhance my grammar	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%
	I can enhance my vocabulary	0%	0%	0%	22.86%	77.14%
	I can speak English fluently without hesitation	0%	0%	0%	31.43%	68.57%
Affective component	I can confidently express my ideas.	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%
	I can be encouraged to speak more when participating in class.	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%
	I can imagine better when creating spoken context	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%
Behavioral component	I'm interested in performing Drama activities in English speaking class	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%

	I want to have more Drama activities in the future in English speaking class.	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%

Thus, after completing the teaching and learning activities using the intervention model with drama-based projects, the researcher found that the cognitive, emotional, and attitudinal components of the students showed positive changes, that the students participated in dynamic and creative classroom interactions, and that their confidence was also enhanced when they spoke and expressed their personal views and opinions. These results were collected and statistically analyzed according to Table 3 above, specifically:

Regarding the cognitive component, 100% of students agreed and completely agreed that learning projects that enhance speaking skills when learning based on drama have helped them change their motivation to learn. Specifically, 37.14% of students agreed, and 62.86% of students completely agreed. Moreover, through drama projects, students also develop ideas, become creative when speaking, limit content constraints, and choose contexts to participate in speaking lessons. 62.86% of students agreed, and 72.29% completely agreed.

Accordingly, 100% of students affirmed that their speaking skills had changed significantly; they felt more interested when participating in speaking lessons. 14.29% of students agreed, and 85.71% of students completely agreed. Based on the survey results, students' shyness when participating in public speaking changed positively. 31.43% of students agreed, and 68.57% of the remaining students completely agreed that they were able to be more confident when participating in speaking, debating, acting, or role-playing in front of a crowd.

When receiving feedback from teachers, students no longer felt shy, were ready to take notes, and made changes. 14.29% of students agreed, and 85.71% of the remaining students completely agreed with this viewpoint.

When evaluating the enhancement of speaking skills in front of the class, the researcher found that 100% of students completely agreed on the change in grammar when thinking and approaching the content to be spoken. They could speak more accurately regarding sentence structure and the types of words arranged in a sentence.

For pronunciation skills, 14.29% of students agreed and 85.71% of students completely agreed that they had enhanced this skill when mispronunciation or incorrect pronunciation was directly corrected by the teacher during class participation. Accordingly, vocabulary was enhanced during the speaking process. Specifically, 22.86% of students agreed, and 77.14% of students completely agreed that they could expand their vocabulary and memorize a considerable amount of vocabulary used in speaking lessons.

Fluency was significantly enhanced by students. Specifically, 31.43% of students agreed, and 68.57% completely agreed about the positive changes when participating in learning to speak English in class.

Regarding the affective component, the researcher found that, based on the survey results, 100% of students completely agreed that they could confidently express their views and opinions on the speaking content. Teachers allowed students to discuss and speak in groups or individually. These opinions were addressed directly in class with the aim of helping students grasp the lesson content and increase their participation. Furthermore, thanks to the encouragement to speak frequently, present opinions, engage in debates, and perform activities, students were able to connect with one another through friendship and mutual support during class participation. With the support of teachers, students were able to visualize the specific speaking context when presenting in front of the class. Teachers consistently provided support to foster motivation and build students' confidence during class participation.

IV. Discussion

The researcher found that, through the above drama projects, students increased their speed of understanding and thinking to reflect on the content of the script that needed to be spoken in accordance with the context required by the teacher (Ahmad, 2016; Hadianto et al., 2021a; Wu, 2020). At the same time, the final post-test scores showed that the frequency of students achieving "Good" to "Excellent" levels increased, which indicates that students' speaking skills were enhanced in both quality and performance, as seen through the three main skills analyzed above, compared to before the intervention of drama-based speaking activities (Anderson & Berry, 2015; Biebricher et al., 2019).

Teachers supported students in understanding the key and important role of the individual when participating in learning planning activities and speaking skill practices in and outside of the classroom. These were based on building and setting up drama to enhance speaking activities at home and in class, helping them develop better speaking skills (Fleming, 2006). Moreover, organized drama activities significantly enhanced speaking skills through thinking ability, creativity, and increased the ability to remember the content of the speech based on visual-spatial-motor and language domains (Alrutz, 2004).

Through drama-based speaking content, students can enjoy foreign language learning more and develop language skills in pronunciation, speaking ability, 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).

The researcher found that the 6A students showed positive changes in their attitudes when participating in learning activities aimed at enhancing speaking skills through drama-based projects. This result was clearly reflected in the three attitude components surveyed by the researcher, including the cognitive component, the affective component, and the behavioral component. These positive attitudes were demonstrated by 100% of students agreeing or strongly agreeing. Furthermore, the researcher found that the motivation of the 6A students was enhanced compared to before the intervention of the teaching action model using drama projects. The students paid more attention to the teacher's instructions and classroom activities because this teaching method was both visually engaging and rich in content. The process of searching for relevant content also helped them develop teamwork and critical thinking skills (Karahan, 2007).

Accordingly, the score distributions in the progress-test and post-test changed positively, with a reduction in the proportion of students with average scores and an increase in the proportion of students with scores categorized as "Good" to "Excellent". Besides that, the attitude survey results showed that the cognitive component, the affective component, and the behavioral component had changed. Students were motivated and enjoyed participating in speaking lessons based on drama projects.

V. Conclusion

The results of the action model intervention in enhancing students' speaking skills are summarized as follows:

First, the researcher demonstrated the effectiveness of the learning model intervention using drama-based projects. This evidence was collected through assessment tests, including a pre-test, progress tests, and a post-test, by comparing overlapping criteria to demonstrate the improvement resulting from the drama-based teaching method. The results showed a decrease in the number of students achieving average scores and an increase in those reaching the "Very Good" and "Excellent" levels in speaking criteria.

Second, the researcher evaluated students' attitudes after completing the intervention learning model. The survey results reflected the adaptability and suitability of the drama-based teaching method in improving students' speaking skills. Notably, 100% of students answered "Agree" or "Strongly Agree" to the survey questions, and they expressed their desire for teachers to continue using drama projects in future classroom speaking activities. Furthermore, the three survey components - students' cognition, effectiveness, and attitude - all achieved the expected results that the researcher had aimed for when applying a new teaching method. This clearly shows that finding and building speaking topics based on drama-based projects, although not a completely new approach, has changed students' attitudes in a more positive and engaging direction.

Based on these results, the researcher proposed some recommendations to enhance speaking skills through drama-based projects. These recommendations aim to further expand the research direction in terms of space and time in the future, helping educators use it as a teaching method. The goal is to help students enhance their comprehensive speaking skills in many different aspects when teachers apply it throughout the course. At the same time, students can learn independently and connect with friends to participate in speaking activities, thereby enhancing the development of better speaking skills.

Finally, it is necessary to add more criteria to comprehensively assess the aspects of students' speaking skills. Within the framework of this paper, the researcher is still limited to three main criteria confidence, fluency, and accuracy to control the teaching time when applying the action model. This also helps the researcher better manage the effectiveness of teaching. However, in the future, the researcher will continue to expand these assessment activities to include two additional aspects: linguistic competence and content.

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