Enhancing Speaking Skills and Decreasing Speaking Anxiety among EFL Preparatory Stage Students Through Drama Techniques

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Abstract

The aim of the current study was to explore the impact of incorporating various drama techniques on enhancing the EFL preparatory stage students' speaking skills and decreasing their speaking anxiety. The quasi-experimental one group pre-posttest design was implemented. The study comprised thirty-seven second year EFL preparatory stage students, all of whom were designated to one experimental group. The participants received instruction on how to employ specific drama techniques in their responses to speaking tasks and activities. The study utilized two primary instruments: a test designed to assess EFL speaking skills and a scale aimed at measuring speaking anxiety. The participants underwent the test and scale both prior to and following the treatment. SPSS (version 19) was utilized for statistical processing of the data. The results of the study demonstrated that the implementation of drama techniques proved to be beneficial in enhancing the EFL preparatory stage students' speaking skills and decreasing their speaking anxiety.

Key words: *Speaking skills, speaking anxiety, drama techniques, EFL preparatory stage students.*

Introduction

Effective communication stands as the principal aim for the students studying English as a foreign language (EFL). In light of the increasing prominence of English as the international medium of communication, EFL learners face an imperative to converse and engage in various scenarios utilizing the English language. Since speaking is the primary means through which communication occurs, it is vital for learners to develop and refine their EFL speaking competencies.

Proficiency in speaking is highly valued in foreign language environments, as it is deemed essential for successful communication, especially when individuals are not conversing in their native language. Developing English speaking skills is crucial for successful communication, as it complements other skills and facilitates effective interaction with native English speakers and individuals worldwide.

The ability to speak a language spontaneously is crucial for achieving fluency in foreign language learning environments. Fluency is dependent on one's performance. In order to become fluent, a learner should actively engage with the language. Nonetheless, EFL speaking inside classrooms is essentially a contrived experience. Engaging students in artificial speaking activities can be quite challenging. In order to effectively practice language elements, students require realistic scenarios where they do not feel like they are simply acting. When students realize they are mimicking a foreign speaker, it can trigger feelings of anxiety.

For decades, as Mac Intyre and Gardner (1994) stated, foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) has garnered significant interest from both researchers and educators alike. This phenomenon is described as the sense of stress, strain, and

concern that arises in second/foreign language settings, encompassing listening, and speaking. Also, Dornyei & Ryan (2015) and MacIntyre (2017) concluded that FLA is acknowledged as a key element in the attainment of proficiency in a foreign language. It is widely accepted that FLA tends to be more pronounced in contexts involving the production of spoken language (Dewaele, 2002; Woodrow, 2006). Furthermore, Liang & Kelsen (2018) concluded that the act of presenting before others is thought to introduce particular obstacles for students who are studying a foreign language.

The fundamental premise regarding FLA pertains to the underdeveloped attempts of students to communicate in a second or foreign language. FLA arises when learners endeavor to effectively utilize a second or foreign language that they have not yet sufficiently or completely mastered. Consequently, it impacts language proficiency negatively.

Students may find their anxiety levels rising when they are required to fulfill oral assignments. Studies have shown that giving presentations and performing in front of classmates is commonly perceived as a situation that elicits profound feelings of anxiety (Zheng, 2008). According to the findings of Ohata (2005) and Ay (2010), the phenomenon of "unpreparedness" significantly affects the speaking anxiety levels among students. Students feel strange and decide to stay silent during the entire class, preferring not to be called upon.

The role of language learning has taken on heightened significance in the modern era, as it allows for better understanding and communication with a global audience. Fortunately, there has been a notable shift towards a more stimulating and communicative form of learning. Thus, motivation stands out as a vital element in the processes of

language learning and teaching. It is imperative for teachers to create a sense of motivation for students within the learning environment, promoting their active engagement and participation in classroom discussions. Currently, the primary objectives of language learning are to enhance motivation and develop communicative competence. This encompasses engaging in activities that promote authentic communication, meaningful tasks, and the application of various communication skills.

Furthermore, Gorjian, Moosavinia, & Jabripour (2010) confirmed that the incorporation of action is crucial for effective language learning, as it fosters the development of body language, elevates motivation levels, and ensures that students remain actively engaged in their educational experience. Drama techniques recognize action as a fundamental aspect of the language learning process.

Incorporating drama into teaching practices motivates learners to acquire new languages in a dynamic and productive manner. So, drama techniques facilitate contexts in which learners learn within relevant environments, respond without hesitation, and stimulate their imaginative capabilities. Schejbal (2006) confirmed that within the realm of foreign language instruction, the concept of drama is not limited to the enactment of classical plays or theatrical productions. Rather, it encourages active engagement from learners. As a result, those who practice the language in the classroom setting are able to relate their experiences to real-world situations.

The rise of drama within language teaching can be attributed to a shift towards prioritizing communicative competence as a key goal of language teaching. Drama activities enable the incorporation of emotional and social dimensions of discourse into the classroom environment. Rather than serving an audience,

the focus of drama in language classes is to support learners, promoting personal growth and interpersonal connections, which ultimately lead to greater self-confidence and enhanced understanding in the foreign language. As a result, drama can be highly beneficial by confirming that language is applied in an appropriate context, no matter how imaginative that context may be perceived (Maley and Duff, 2001).

Context of the Problem

Despite the significance of EFL speaking skills during the preparatory stage, students often struggle with deficiencies in their speaking skills. This issue is believed to stem from the continued use of traditional teaching methods for speaking. It is uncommon for students to be prompted to articulate their thoughts in a manner that goes beyond simple word expressions as a response the teacher's questions. Furthermore, the instructional techniques and methods used typically do not provide students with a clear understanding of speaking norms or how native speakers converse.

As noted by Ruixue, Zejun, and Yijing (2012), enhancing students' speaking skills has consistently posed difficulties for teachers and students alike. Employing conventional teaching approaches often result in diminished motivation among students to engage in speaking activities, limited access to authentic language exposure, and an inadequate environment for practicing English. Furthermore, the primary factors contributing to learners' low proficiency in speaking include a lack of motivation to engage in speaking practice, absence of a target language environment, and insufficient opportunities to practice speaking with peers.

The multifaceted characteristics of speaking skills pose significant obstacles to achieving proficiency, necessitating that

language learners dedicate considerable time and effort to attain mastery. Additionally, speaking is a highly sought-after skill, as the ability to communicate effectively in a language is often synonymous with speaking it fluently. In our increasingly interconnected world, a majority of learners focus on English to develop their speaking skills. Despite being the most formidable skill, many English language learners encounter limited opportunities for speaking practice outside the classroom, even with the advancements in technology (Zhang & Head, 2009; Dincer, 2017; Pawlak, 2018).

According to Tanveer (2007) and Shabani (2013), speaking a foreign language constitutes a major difficulty for the majority of EFL learners in language courses. The difficulty lies in the fact that it is essential for the speaker to have quick access to all relevant knowledge needed to formulate the appropriate language swiftly, as opposed to other skills where learners can afford to take longer to integrate new input with their existing understanding.

Numerous studies have highlighted the low level of proficiency in EFL speaking skills within Arab countries, with a particular focus on Egypt. (Torky, 2006; Ghany & Latif, 2012; Abdelmageed & El-Naggar, 2018; Eissa, 2019). They have shown that Egyptian EFL students at various educational levels experience significant obstacles in speaking English. Such obstacles are a result of several contributing factors, such as the limited availability of speaking practice opportunities, the widespread use of traditional pedagogical approaches that focus on memorization and limit oral communication, an excessive dependence on the native language within the classroom, and the absence of suitable teaching resources, all of which intensify the difficulties encountered by students.

Upon overseeing and participating in the program of teaching practice at schools, the researcher observed that second year EFL preparatory stage students struggle with fluency, accuracy and confidence in speaking English. The students appeared to favor their first language during speaking practice, showing minimal to no dedication to improving their verbal proficiency. Furthermore, they seemed hesitant and withdrawn when speaking in front of their peers, displaying frustration, discomfort, and a lack of willingness to collaborate. Moreover, based on the interviews with EFL teachers, the majority of them reported that they utilized conventional teaching approaches when teaching speaking skills. They further noted that they did not prioritize the enhancement of these skills, as they were typically compelled to cover a lengthy and rigorous syllabus before the semester's end. Moreover, some teachers felt that the available textbooks did not include adequate activities for the development of speaking skills, and there was a lack of defined methods for assessing these skills.

In addition, a pilot study implemented by the researcher on second year EFL preparatory stage students. The pilot study findings showed that most learners (82%) struggled with speaking, facing challenges such as errors in pronunciation, inadequate and insufficient understanding of grammar, diminished self-esteem, and a significant anxiety level related to speaking.

Statement of the Problem

In conclusion, the problem identified in this study pertains to the limited level of verbal communication exhibited by second-year EFL preparatory stage students, as well as the heightened speaking anxiety they face when speaking. To address this issue, drama techniques will be implemented to

decrease participants' speaking anxiety and enhance their speaking skills.

Aims of the Study

The primary aim of the present study was to explore the impact of integrating different drama techniques on enhancing the second year EFL preparatory stage students' speaking skills and decreasing their speaking anxiety.

Questions of the Study

The ongoing study was conducted to address the subsequent questions:

1. How far would using drama techniques be effective in enhancing second year EFL preparatory stage students' overall speaking skills?
2. How far would using drama techniques be effective in enhancing second year EFL preparatory stage students' accuracy, fluency, and pragmatic skills?
3. How far would using drama techniques be effective in decreasing second year EFL preparatory stage students' speaking anxiety?

Hypotheses of the Study

The hypotheses of the current study can be articulated in the following lines:

1. There would be a statistically significant difference between the study participants' mean scores on the overall EFL speaking skills pre-posttests favoring the post.
2. There would be a statistically significant difference between the study participants' mean scores on the accuracy, fluency, and pragmatic skills pre-posttests favoring the post.

3.   There would be a statistically significant difference between the study participants' mean scores in the pre and post administrations of the speaking anxiety scale favoring the pre administration.

Significance of the Study

The findings of this study have the potential to benefit second year preparatory stage students, EFL teachers, and curriculum developers. By implementing various drama activities and techniques, students can enhance their EFL speaking skills and decrease speaking anxiety. Furthermore, the study suggests a revision of the current teaching methods in Egyptian preparatory stage schools to enhance EFL speaking skills through the integration of drama techniques.

Delimitations of the Study

The scope of the present study was restricted to the following elements:

1.   Thirty seven second year EFL preparatory stage students, Mansour Mashally Preparatory School, Edfu, Aswan.
2.   The EFL speaking skills, comprising accuracy, fluency, and pragmatic skills, which are featured in the English language syllabus intended for second-year students at the preparatory stage for the second semester of the academic year 2023/2024.

Definition of Terms

Drama Techniques

The integration of drama techniques in the instruction of foreign languages involves a series of strategies that guide the actions of learners within carefully crafted scenarios, with the goal of fostering the development of both communicative

abilities and the student's character (Shraiber and Yaroslavova, 2016).

In the present study, the researchers operationally defines drama techniques as the instructional activities and learning tasks (e.g. simulation, mime, improvisation, and role-play) utilized by the second year EFL preparatory stage students to articulate their personality, emotions, and thoughts when addressing particular speaking tasks aid in enhancing their speaking skills and alleviating speaking anxiety.

Speaking skills

According to Brown (2004, p. 140) speaking is "an interactive process of constructing meaning that involve producing, receiving and processing information".

In the ongoing study, speaking skills are operationally defined as the ability of the participants to express themselves fluently and precisely through the use of specific drama techniques.

Speaking Anxiety

Speaking anxiety is essentially the fear that arises when one communicates orally in a language (Wilson, 2006).

Brown (1994) stated that speaking anxiety involves apprehension, fear, tension, and uneasiness felt by learners when trying to use language verbally.

In this study, speaking anxiety is characterized as a type of anxiety that is specific to the situation. This form of anxiety occurs each time the student attempts to express themselves in English.

Review of Literature

Drama Activities and Techniques

In the present era, capturing student interest and motivation in the classroom is a challenging endeavor, prompting teachers to employ various methods and techniques to actively engage students in the process of acquiring knowledge. Among these techniques utilized in language learning situations are the drama activities and techniques. Aldavero (2008) draws a distinction between the traditional type of drama, specifically the performance of a play, and a diverse range of additional activities like games, songs, role plays, simulations, and more.

According to Bobkina (2015), drama techniques are founded on the Communicative Approach, providing students with opportunities for pair and group activities that emphasize speaking interaction and negotiation of meaning. The regular rotation of groups enables students to develop stronger connections and bolster their self-assurance. In this learner-centered environment, the teacher serves as a facilitator, empowering students to take charge of their own learning.

Numerous research studies have highlighted the advantages of incorporating drama into foreign language education, as evidenced by the works of Brumfit (1991), Maley and Duff (2001), Philips (2003), and Aldavero (2008). Engaging in drama tasks and activities allows students to utilize language to convey feelings and emotions, tackle challenges, make choices, and interact socially. Furthermore, drama activities play a crucial role in enhancing oral communication abilities, as well as reading and writing skills. These activities are particularly beneficial for students who have a limited vocabulary in the foreign language. Engaging in drama allows students to not only refine their speaking skills but also to engage in conversation more

frequently. This improvement arises from their awareness of better pronunciation, which in turn fosters greater confidence and diminishes feelings of shyness. By redirecting students' attention from the specific language components being taught to more enjoyable communication exercises, it is possible to diminish the frustrations and tensions that often obstruct comprehension and production in language classes.

Incorporating drama activities into the language classroom is vital for enhancing speaking skills. As noted by Ulas (2008), drama has emerged as a promising technique for facilitating language learning for centuries, but it is only in the last few decades that its effectiveness in enhancing oral proficiency has been emphasized.

Aldavero (2008) asserted that engaging in drama activities enhances students' social skills, critical thinking abilities, and problem-solving capabilities, while also improving their verbal communication skills abilities by examining diverse language styles, types and degrees of linguistic expression. Additionally, Phillips (2003) noted that dramatization offers a significant advantage for shy students, allowing them to "hide behind" a character while still expressing their own personalities. This involvement in such activities fosters a deeper connection to the language, making it more meaningful and memorable compared to traditional methods of drilling or mechanical repetition.

Drama offers several paradoxical benefits in the workplace. For instance, participants can become emotionally engaged while maintaining a sense of detachment, as they are aware that the scenario is purely fictional. They can also take on serious roles without feeling accountable, as the make-believe setting absolves them of responsibility. Additionally, they can simultaneously act as both performers and spectators, and draw from their own real-

life experiences while also generating new ones within the symbolic realm of drama (Fleming, 2006).

Drama techniques offer multiple benefits, such as facilitating students' comprehension of meaningful content more effectively than other methods. Learning takes place through students' interaction with their surroundings, and enhanced retention of lessons occurs when students actively involve a variety of sensory organs in their learning experiences. Furthermore, students learn best through active participation and firsthand experiences. Effective participation is crucial for learning emotional conduct, and educational environments with multiple stimuli make learning easier and more enduring (Ulas, 2008).

There are numerous drama activities that can be implemented within or outside of the classroom to foster environments where students engage with language in a relevant and meaningful context. These activities leverage the inherent capacity of the students to imitate, replicate, and convey their thoughts and feelings through physical expressions or gestures. The following is an overview of the main drama activities including mime, role-play, simulation, and improvisation.

Mime, which considered as an art form that conveys ideas or narratives without spoken words, utilizing gestures, physical movements, and facial expressions. The practice of mime plays a vital role in nurturing creativity, imagination, and inventiveness, while also promoting cooperative learning and effective teamwork collaboration. Although mime does not incorporate spoken language or conventional forms of communication, it is an exceptionally valuable activity. This practice allows students to comprehend the lesson's content without initially depending on verbal expression. In addition, engaging in mime enables

students to set aside concerns regarding language, which simplifies the process of performing in front of their peers. This method is entertaining for them and is frequently utilized as a preliminary activity (Wessels, 1998; Dowby and Kaplan, 2011).

Role play is a crucial aspect in drama, characterized by the portrayal of a devised role within a hypothetical or unreal setting. By participating in role plays, students are effectively generating their own contexts, which provides them with the opportunity to test their comprehension of reality and improve their skills in engaging with others. Role-playing exercises enable students to prepare for and rehearse potential future scenarios. Engaging in practical activities enhances students' motivation and fosters their involvement in the learning experience (Huang, 2008).

Through role plays, students simulate various scenarios that necessitate the use of different language registers with the intention of preparing them for the language they are expected to use in situations beyond the classroom environment. The implementation of role plays enhances cooperative learning, fosters interaction within the classroom, boosts motivation, and strengthens the relationship between teachers and students. Role-play activities serve to fulfill a diverse array of objectives, which encompass both the delivery of information and the modifications of participants' attitudes (Buckner, 1999).

Simulation represents a comprehensive and participatory experience where the content and roles that participants adopt are intentionally structured to replicate the realities faced in specific contexts. This activity resembles a game; however, it focuses on ordinary and everyday scenarios, encouraging contemplation regarding the actions taken. Consequently, simulation establishes an environment that requires learners to engage in activities that hold personal significance, resulting in a genuine feeling of

achievement or disappointment based on the outcomes achieved (Wessels, 1998).

Improvisation offers learners the chance to enhance their language communication abilities while simultaneously boosting their confidence, which ultimately contributes to the formation of positive self-concepts. There are three key goals associated with improvisational exercises: they contribute to the enhancement of student pronunciation, support the correct utilization of grammatical structures, and foster vocabulary practice. Sharing these functions with students could be crucial for promoting their engagement in verbal communication and establishing a foundation of trust, which will help them feel secure and less apprehensive about making mistakes (Maples, 2002).

Moreover, the practice of improvisation enhances students' imaginative and creative abilities, given that the uncertainty of events keeps them engaged and responsive. Additionally, it promotes dialogue among peers. Upon concluding the activity, participants may engage in a discussion regarding the language and vocabulary utilized during the improvisation, offering suggestions for enhancement. By engaging in improvisation, students enhance their language skills while simultaneously boosting their self-confidence, as they become aware of their existing knowledge and their capacity to apply it effectively (Barbu, 2007).

As previously detailed, various activities fall under the umbrella of drama, including mime, role-play, simulation, and improvisation. All of these activities enhance the enjoyment and motivation of the learning process. As students participate in these activities, they not only build their self-confidence and cognitive skills but also nurture their creativity and imaginative thinking. Through drama activities, students are placed in a range

of situations that necessitate their engagement as if they were navigating real-life experiences, allowing them to practice daily expressions and vocabulary that will be highly useful in their interactions. Furthermore, these activities contribute to the enhancement of autonomy and responsibility among students. This development takes place within a conducive environment that promotes effective learning.

In conclusion, the incorporation of drama into language lessons is a potent strategy that can inspire students to engage more deeply in language learning while simultaneously advancing their language proficiency, especially in speaking. Drama serves as a platform for students to address their shyness, empowering them to speak out loud, overcome their fears, and cultivate respect for one another. Consequently, drama activities emphasize not only the structural aspects of language but also its communicative functions, which significantly enhances the students' communicative competence. This encourages students to surmount their challenges and alleviate their anxiety associated with speaking English.

Speaking Skills

Speaking is a fundamental skill, serving as a vital connection among individuals who share a common language. It allows individuals to articulate their concerns, thoughts, feelings, and emotions to one another. For those who are illiterate, speaking becomes the primary means of conveying and elucidating their ideas, as they lack the ability to write. Speaking, as stated by Ulas (2008), stands out as the primary and essential method of communication among people. Effective communication is fundamentally rooted in the ability to articulate thoughts clearly and with confidence, in addition to utilizing proper voice projection. It is widely accepted that proficiency in

speaking is closely associated with success in life, as it plays a crucial role both individually and within society.

Developing speaking skills is vital for proficient communication in any language, especially for those who are not utilizing their native language. EFL learners should prioritize the enhancement of their speaking skills, along with other language skills, to improve communication with native and non-native English speakers. It is vital for EFL learners to develop their speaking skills, not just for exam purposes, but also for effective communication in real-life situations. The ability to speak fluently and accurately is crucial for social interactions and self-expression.

As Al-ma'shy (2011) stated, speaking is frequently utilized predominantly within the classroom environment, as it plays a crucial role in the instruction of other skills, including listening, reading, and writing. Consequently, the instruction of speaking skills should be regarded as a fundamental component of English language curricula in educational institutions, given its importance in fostering interaction within the classroom. Furthermore, Afshar and Rahimi (2014) highlighted the need for special attention and instruction in EFL contexts, particularly when it comes to speaking as one of the macro skills. In addition, Sanaa (2013) affirmed that the ability to speak English fluently is a key determinant in the scholarly performance of EFL students.

Speaking demands that learners are equipped with the knowledge to generate particular aspects of language, such as grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary (linguistic competence), and also understanding the context, purpose, and methods for employing these language features (sociolinguistic competence). Within the same framework, Acquiring proficiency in a foreign language involves more than merely understanding its

grammatical and semantic structures; it is essential for learners to comprehend the ways in which native speakers engage in daily communication (Brown, 2001).

The primary objective of teaching speaking skills in contemporary education is to achieve communicative efficiency. Teachers facilitate the development of their students' speaking skills by delivering authentic practice experiences that prepare them for effective communication in real-life contexts. Teachers support their students in fostering the ability to create sentences that are not only grammatically sound and logically connected but also appropriate for various contexts, accompanied by intelligible pronunciation. As a result, pedagogical approaches should prioritize active student involvement, with the teaching-learning process designed to engage students effectively, thus enhancing their motivation to participate in classroom activities. Therefore, it is essential for every educator to strive to establish a novel environment and a distinct atmosphere in the classroom for their students.

A variety of factors support incorporating speaking instruction within the classroom environment. Such activities provide students with the opportunity to practice genuine speaking skills in a safe environment, enabling them to effectively utilize the different language elements they have previously acquired. The extent to which students engage in practicing the target language directly correlates with their development as independent learners. Therefore, students will be capable of engaging in conversation with little conscious effort. Finally, engaging in well-designed activities is inherently pleasurable, which will encourage students to participate actively in classroom tasks (Harmer, 2007).

Despite the significance of speaking skills, it is evident that students demonstrate a clear reluctance to freely participate in oral activities (Cheng, 2000). Speech difficulties have been categorized into two types linguistic and affective. Linguistic obstacles that obstruct students from participating in discussions may include mispronunciation, limited vocabulary, grammar mistakes, and difficulties with fluency and accuracy. The second category encompasses affective factors such as lack of confidence, anxiety, and shyness. Consequently, speaking a foreign language is perceived as a challenging, demanding, and stressful endeavor for learners (Humaera, 2015; Leong & Ahmadi, 2017).

The Role of Drama Techniques in Enhancing Speaking Skills

In today's educational landscape, it is increasingly difficult to engage students' attention and interests within the classroom. Nevertheless, drama emerges as a potent educational tool that promotes collaborative exploration of content, human experiences, and significant historical events among students of all ages. Additionally, drama mimics real-world scenarios, enhances self-expression, and facilitates experimentation with language (Dowby and Kaplan, 2011).

Various studies have proven that well-constructed drama activities significantly enhance the learning experience and aid in improving speaking skills. Makita (1995) highlighted that the utilization of dramatic and role-playing activities serve as effective techniques of considerable value for encouraging active student involvement in the classroom.

Drama proves to be a highly valuable method for teaching pronunciation as it provides an opportunity to enhance multiple facets of communicative competence, such as intonation, discourse, non-verbal communication, and pragmatic awareness,

in a cohesive manner. In addition, incorporating various elements in the acquisition of oral communication skills enhances the effectiveness of communication, with drama activities playing a key role in honing these skills (Goodwin, 2001).

In addition, dramatic activities offer students a variety of contextualized and structured tasks designed to support learning. that progressively encourage greater participation and enhance oral language skills. Additionally, they are low-pressure and highly enjoyable (Peregoy and Boyle, 2008). Desiatova (2009) pointed out that the use of drama activities presents evident benefits for language learning. It fosters an environment where students are encouraged to participate in dialogue, and provides them with the opportunity to communicate effectively, utilizing non-verbal forms of expression, including body language and facial cues, regardless of their proficiency in spoken language.

Speaking Anxiety

Since the 1980s, foreign language anxiety (FLA) has been a topic of discussion among researchers, including Horwitz et al. (1986), who have identified it as a distinct element influencing learners' oral production. In particular, learners who experience anxiety in foreign language contexts frequently regard speaking in the target language as the most daunting skill. Wörde (2003) argued that students feel stressed when they are called upon to speak in the classroom.

FLA significantly impacts EFL learners' language performance and acquisition, which is more prevalent in productive language skills such as writing and speaking than in receptive skills (Chiu et al., 2010). Zheng (2008) mentioned that students may experience heightened levels of anxiety when tasked with completing an oral assignment. It has been noted that

presenting orally and performing in the presence of fellow students can be particularly anxiety provoking.

Considerable scholarly attention has been directed towards the study of speaking anxiety. Dalkiliç (2001) explored the correlation between students' improvement in speaking courses and their foreign language anxiety levels. The results demonstrated a significant link between anxiety levels of the participants and their performance in speaking courses. Moreover, Ay (2010) revealed that learners demonstrated considerable anxiety in relation to their productive skills at an advanced level.

Additionally, Balemir (2009) conducted a study to explore the correlation between the level of proficiency and the intensity of speaking anxiety experienced in EFL environments. The findings showed that the participants encounter an intermediate degree of speaking anxiety in speaking programs. Also, Saltan (2003) explored the viewpoints of both students and teachers regarding EFL speaking anxiety. The findings revealed that while students do face some level of anxiety when it comes to EFL speaking; however, the extent of this anxiety is relatively low.

Tianjian (2010) conducted a study examining the speaking anxiety experienced by Chinese EFL learners, along with its correlations to various components such as risk-taking in language classes, sociability within the classroom environment, speaking self-efficacy, language proficiency, trait anxiety, and reluctance to communicate. The findings showed that the majority of the participants experienced intermediate to significant speaking anxiety levels. Additionally, while there was no significant difference in anxiety levels in relation to gender, notable differences were identified among the various groups of

proficiency. The study also identified reciprocal influences between language achievement and speaking anxiety.

Considering speaking anxiety and upon examination of numerous studies dealt with it such as (Wörde, 2003; Ohata, 2005; Park & Lee, 2005; Woodrow, 2006; Awan et al., 2010.; Dalkılıç, 2013), it is evident that there are various factors contributing to why EFL learners encounter such anxiety. These factors include the fear of public speaking, oral communication, limited vocabulary, pronunciation errors, grammatical limitations, oral testing, influence of native speakers, and the teacher's approach to error correction.

Decreasing Speaking Anxiety Through Drama Techniques

Despite its ancient origins, drama integration into language classrooms has been modest yet steady over the years. Hamilton and Mcleod (1993) asserted that drama techniques harmonize well with the fundamental aspects of language acquisition. Zerey (2008) and Galante (2012) underlined that the development of speaking skills occupies a distinct position which considered as one of the many benefits of drama in language teaching contexts.

Various researchers, such as Miccoli (2003), Wood Shand (2008), Zerey (2008), Gorjian et al. (2010), and Galante (2012), have explored the use of drama techniques in foreign language classrooms in order to address speaking anxiety. The findings suggest that drama can positively impact students' attitudes and beliefs towards learning and engaging in conversation in a foreign language in front of an audience or in a classroom setting. Drama techniques exert both psychological and physical influences on students' language skills, leading to enhanced self-confidence and motivation. Additionally, these techniques help lower anxiety levels, which are vital for effective communication

in foreign language classes, by actively involving students in their learning experiences.

As the use of drama techniques for enhancing EFL preparatory stage students' speaking skills remains relatively unexplored in the different levels of Egyptian educational environments, the ongoing study explores the impact of implementing drama techniques on enhancing speaking skills and decreasing speaking anxiety among second year EFL preparatory stage students.

Method

The current study employed a one group pre-post quasi-experimental design, where the group underwent testing both before and after conducting the experiment.

Participants

The current study involved thirty seven second year EFL preparatory stage students, Mansour Mashally Preparatory School, Edfu, Aswan.

Instruments and Materials

For the purpose of fulfilling the aims of the ongoing study, The researcher developed and utilized the instruments detailed below:

The EFL Speaking Skills List

The study at hand addressed the speaking skills that are part of the English language syllabus offered to second year EFL preparatory stage students, the second semester of the academic year 2023/2024. The EFL speaking skills list is illustrated in Appendix (1).

The EFL Speaking Skills Test

Test Description

The test seeks to assess the students' performance in the specific EFL speaking skills relevant to this study. The test, as shown in (Appendix 2), comprises two distinct parts. Part (A) in which the students are asked to articulate their responses orally to various situations, responding to the question, "What would you say in the following situations?". Further, Part (B) in which the students are given the opportunity to select one topic from the available topics for discussion.

To provide correct answers to the test questions, students are required to pronounce both vowels and consonants accurately, maintain the correct stress patterns, choose appropriate vocabulary to express their meanings, apply grammatical structures properly, speak fluently while avoiding unnecessary repetition and hesitation, and ensure that their listeners can understand them. Additionally, they should clearly express their opinions with rationale, provide advice, convey their knowledge of the topic, and make requests in a polite manner.

The EFL speaking skills test was initially tested on a group of 35 second year EFL preparatory stage students, who were not included in the study group, to determine the test suitability for the participants, the test items' simplicity/difficulty, the test instructions' clarity, and the time allotted for the test.

Validity and Reliability of the Test

The test was administered to EFL jurors to assess its validity. The EFL jurors validated the test, asserting that it accurately evaluates the intended EFL speaking skills. Additionally, the validity coefficient of the EFL speaking skills

test was derived from the square root of the reliability coefficient. As a result, the validity coefficient was established at (.81), which is regarded as acceptable. Based on that, the test is valid and can assess participants' EFL speaking skills before and after the treatment. Furthermore, the reliability of the test was evaluated using the test-retest method. Thirty five second year EFL preparatory stage students underwent their first testing on the 25th of February 2024, and were subsequently retested two weeks later. The correlation coefficient obtained was (0.79). In order to ascertain the suitable time allotted for the EFL speaking skills test, the average response time of students was computed. The cumulative time was divided by the total number of students who undertook the test. It was thirty minutes.

Grading the EFL Speaking Skills Test

To grade the EFL speaking skills test implemented in the ongoing study, the researcher developed an EFL speaking skills rubric as illustrated in Appendix (3).

The Speaking Skills Rubric

The researcher developed a rubric to evaluate the participants' speaking skills following the completion of the test. This rubric is divided into three sections: the first section focuses on accuracy skills, the second on fluency skills, and the third on pragmatic skills. Each section includes five performance levels, rated on a scale from 1 to 5, where "5" indicates the highest level of performance and "1" signifies the lowest.

The speaking skills rubric was administered to a panel of EFL specialists and jurors to validate it. The jurors were requested to provide feedback on the appropriateness of each performance level in relation to the various speaking skills. Modifications to the scoring rubric were made based on the

jurors' feedback and recommendations. The conclusive version of the speaking skills rubric can be found in Appendix (3).

The Speaking Anxiety Scale

The researcher formulated the speaking anxiety scale employed in the current study, inspired by the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) developed by Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986). Among the 33 items of Horwitz's FLCAS, the researcher identified 16 items that are directly pertinent to foreign language speaking anxiety. Each of these items is assessed on a 5-point response scale (A- Always true of me; B- Usually true of me; C- Somewhat true of me; D- Usually not true of me; E- Never true of me). The speaking anxiety scale was administered prior to and following the application of the drama techniques to assess the participants' levels of foreign language speaking anxiety and to evaluate the effectiveness of these techniques in reducing their speaking anxiety.

Validity

To ascertain the content validity of the preliminary version of the foreign language speaking anxiety scale, it was evaluated by a panel of EFL specialists and jurors. They were requested to assess the scale's face validity, particularly regarding the scale items clarity and their relevance to the participants' proficiency levels. The jury unanimously concluded that the speaking anxiety scale was clear and well-suited for the participants of this study, thereby validating its effectiveness in measuring their speaking anxiety.

Reliability

The test-retest method was employed to assess the reliability of the foreign language speaking anxiety scale. This scale was first given to a cohort of second year EFL preparatory stage

students (N=35) and subsequently re-administered to the same group after a two-week interval. The Pearson correlation coefficient calculated between the two assessments was found to be (.76). This finding indicates that the foreign language speaking anxiety scale is a consistent and reliable measure of the participants' speaking anxiety.

Scoring the Speaking Anxiety Scale

The participants, guided by the researcher, were requested to fill out the scale by indicating one of the following options for each of the sixteen statements: 'always true of me,' 'usually true of me,' 'somewhat true of me,' 'usually not true of me,' or 'never true of me'. Each response is assigned a score ranging from five points for 'always true of me' to one point for 'never true of me'. A participant who selects 'always true of me' for all statements would achieve five marks for each statement, leading to a maximum total score of eighty. In contrast, a participant who chooses 'usually true of me' for all statements would score four points each, resulting in a total of sixty-four, and so on. Thus, a higher score reflects an increased level of speaking anxiety.

The Program Based on Drama Techniques

The program aimed to support second year EFL preparatory stage students in enhancing their speaking skills and alleviating their speaking anxiety. The program sessions included various objectives considering the speaking skills including accuracy and its sub-skills (e.g. articulating vowels and consonants accurately, creating an accurate stress pattern, employing suitable vocabulary to express meaning, and utilizing grammatical structures correctly); fluency and its sub-skills (e.g. expressing thoughts fluently and steering clear of excessive repetition and pauses, clearly demonstrating expertise in the topic at hand.); and pragmatic skills (e.g. articulating opinions with well-founded

reasons, giving advice, making a polite request, and presenting suggestions).

Implemented in the second semester of the academic year 2023-2024, the program based on drama techniques extended over a period of two months and included twelve sessions, with each session lasting for two hours. The first session was dedicated to introducing the program intended for second year EFL preparatory stage students. Subsequent sessions were dedicated to instructional activities, during which students were trained to utilize various drama techniques, such as simulation, improvisation, mime, and role-play, aimed at enhancing their EFL speaking skills and alleviating their speaking anxiety. At the end of each session, students were evaluated through different types of questions and activities. For the final version of the program based on drama techniques, implemented in this study, see appendix (5).

Results of the Study

The conclusions drawn from this study are articulated in accordance with the formulated hypotheses, utilizing the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 19. A summary of the results is outlined below:

Hypotheses (1)

The first hypothesis asserts that "there is a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the study participants on the overall EFL speaking skills pre-posttests favoring the post". Presented in the subsequent table are the mean scores, standard deviations, t-value, and level of significance pertaining to students' overall speaking skills on the pre-post-tests.

Table (1): The t-value, mean scores, standard deviations, and level of significance on the overall EFL speaking skills pre-posttests.

Skill	Measurement	N	Mean	S.D	T-Value	D.F	Sig.
Overall EFL speaking skills	Pre	37	23.37	2.34			
	Post	37	42.94	2.60	32.42	36	0.05

The data presented in Table (1) demonstrates that the study participants' mean score on the overall EFL speaking skills posttest surpasses their mean score on the pre-test, with a t-value of (32.42), which is statistically significant at the 0.05 level. Therefore, the first hypothesis was supported.

The results of the first hypothesis showed that there was a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the study participants on the overall EFL speaking skills pre-posttests in favor of the post. As shown in Table (1), the participants of the study demonstrated a greater enhancement in their overall EFL speaking skills during the post-assessment when compared to the pre-assessment. This result statistically supports the first hypothesis. Moreover, this enhancement illustrated in Figure (1) can be associated with the application of the program based on drama techniques.

Figure (1): The study participants mean scores on the overall EFL speaking skills pre-post tests
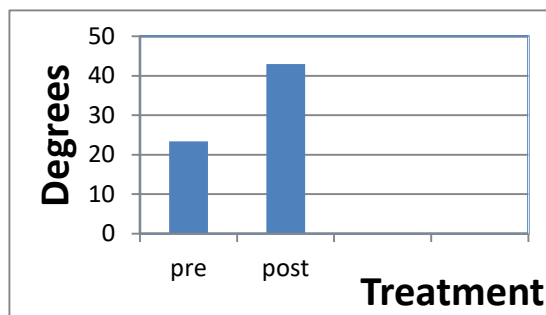
The effect size of the program based on drama techniques is indicated in the following table:

Table (2): The effect size of the program based on drama techniques on the overall EFL speaking skills.

Skill	t-value	d-value	Effect size
Overall EFL speaking skills	**32.42**	**5.32**	**Large**

According to the data illustrated in Table (2), there is a correlation between the enhancement of the study participants' overall EFL speaking skills and the implementation of the program based on drama techniques, which has been shown to effectively enhance students' overall EFL speaking skills.

Hypotheses (2)

The second hypothesis asserts that "there is a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the study participants on the accuracy, fluency, and pragmatic skills pre-posttests favoring the post". The following table presents students' mean scores, standard deviations, t-value and level of significance in the accuracy, fluency, and pragmatic skills pre-posttests.

Table (3): The t-value, mean scores, standard deviations, and level of significance in the accuracy, fluency, and pragmatic skills pre-posttests.

Skills	Measurement	N	Mean	S.D	T-Value	D.F	Sig.
Accuracy	Pre	37	8.48	1.48	20.47	36	0.05
	Post	37	15.51	1.60			
Fluency	Pre	37	6.56	1.25	18.43	36	0.05
	Post	37	11.51	1.26			
Pragmatic	Pre	37	8.32	1.49	20.49	36	0.05
	Post	37	15.91	1.25			

According to the information in Table (3), the mean scores achieved by the study participants on the accuracy, fluency, and pragmatic skills posttests are greater than those in the pretests. The t-values for these skills are (20.47) for accuracy, (18.43) for fluency, and (20.49) for pragmatic skills. All t-values are significant at the 0.05 level of significance. As a result, the second hypothesis was confirmed.

The results of the second hypothesis verified a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the study participants on the accuracy, fluency, and pragmatic skills pre-posttests favoring the posttests. Table (3) indicated that t-values were significant at 0.05 level. This demonstrated and statistically validated the second hypothesis.

The current study aimed to enhance the accuracy, fluency, and pragmatic skills of the second year EFL preparatory stage students through the implementation of a program based on drama techniques. In terms of accuracy skills, these students demonstrated improvements in their pronunciation of vowel and consonant sounds, the proper implementation of stress patterns, the use of suitable vocabulary for effective communication, and the proper construction of grammatical structures.

Furthermore, with respect to fluency skills, the students exhibited a greater ability to articulate their thoughts smoothly, minimizing instances of unnecessary repetition and hesitation, thereby facilitating listener comprehension and effectively conveying their knowledge of the subject matter. Regarding pragmatic skills, the students commenced to articulate their opinions with supporting reasons, offer suggestions, make polite requests, and provide advice. Consequently, the post assessment results revealed significant development in the students' accuracy, fluency, and pragmatic skills, attributable to the program based on drama techniques, as detailed in the following table:

Table (4): The effect size of the program based on drama techniques on accuracy, fluency, and pragmatic skills.

Skills	t-value	d-value	Effect size
Accuracy	20.47	3.36	Large
Fluency	18.43	3.02	Large
Pragmatic	20.49	3.36	Large

Hypotheses (3)

The third hypothesis asserts that "there is a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the study participants in the pre and post administrations of the speaking anxiety scale favoring the pre administration''. The subsequent table illustrates the participants' mean scores, standard deviations, t-values, and significance levels in the pre and post measurements of the speaking anxiety scale.

Table (5): The t-value, mean scores, standard deviations, and level of significance in the pre and post administrations of the speaking anxiety scale.

Scale	Measurement	N	Mean	S.D	T-Value	D.F	Sig.
The Speaking Anxiety Scale	**Pre**	37	63.05	2.99	37.47	36	0.05
	Post	37	30.83	4.47			

As shown in Table (5), the participants' mean score in the pre-administration of the speaking anxiety scale exceeds their mean score in the post-administration of the same scale. The "t-value" obtained is (37.47), indicating significance at the (0.05) level. Therefore, this result affirms the third hypothesis.

The analysis of the third hypothesis demonstrated a statistically significant difference between the participants' mean scores in the pre and post administrations of the speaking anxiety scale, favoring the pre administration. Table (5) illustrates that the t-value is significant at the (0.05) level. Therefore, the third hypothesis was confirmed and found to be statistically supported. Figure (2) shows these results:

Figure (2): The mean scores of the study participants in the pre and post administrations of the speaking anxiety scale
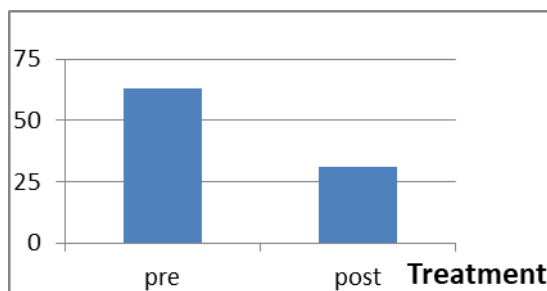
The current study aimed to alleviate speaking anxiety among second year EFL preparatory stage students by implementing a program based on some drama techniques, which included various speaking activities, tasks, and exercises. These activities encouraged students to enhance their speaking skills, promoting both accuracy and fluency. Additionally, the study participants received training to implement a range of drama techniques, including simulation, mime, improvisation, and role-play. Consequently, the post-assessment results demonstrated a significant reduction in speaking anxiety among the students, attributable to the program based on drama techniques. The subsequent table illustrates the effect size of the program on the participants' speaking anxiety.

Table (6): The effect size of the program based on drama techniques on the study participants' speaking anxiety.

Scale	t-value	d-value	Effect size
The Speaking Anxiety Scale	**37.47**	**6.16**	**Large**

Discussion

The main objective of the ongoing study was to enhance speaking skills and decrease speaking anxiety among second year EFL preparatory stage students by implementing a program based on drama techniques. This program incorporated various drama techniques, including simulation, mime, improvisation, and role-play, alongside a range of speaking tasks and activities presented to the participants. The results indicated that the a program based on drama techniques significantly enhanced the EFL speaking skills of the participants and decreased their speaking anxiety. These positive outcomes can be attributed to the employed drama techniques' effectiveness, the suitability of

the activities provided, and the overall structure of the program sessions.

Utilizing drama as a pedagogical tool is an effective strategy for enhancing students' oral communication skills. The implementation of drama techniques supports the development of independent learning in speaking classes, as these techniques create structured learning experiences that maximize student participation and collaboration, both as individuals or in group settings. As a result, students are encouraged to engage actively in speaking activities. Additionally, drama techniques promote interaction among students, allowing them to fulfill the tasks assigned to them. The group learning component inherent in drama techniques provides numerous benefits for students during speaking activities. For students, collaborative learning is instrumental in fostering their independence and enhancing their ability to work together in speaking contexts. Through the process of practice and the collaborative exchange of ideas, students are motivated to engage in active, serious, and critical thinking as they participate in speaking.

Conclusions

1. The present study explored the impact of incorporating various drama techniques on enhancing speaking skills and decreasing speaking anxiety among EFL preparatory stage students.

2. The implementation of the drama techniques effectively enhanced the students' EFL speaking skills and simultaneously decreased their speaking anxiety.

3.   Drama techniques can be utilized as a valuable resource for students to gain and improve their linguistic abilities. These techniques create dynamic and practice-based learning environments that encourage active participation and interaction that significantly enhance students' language proficiency.

4.   It is essential to recognize drama not just as a pleasurable activity outside the classroom but as a teaching strategy that actively engages students in meaningful and productive endeavors.

5.   In the context of drama, students learn through active participation, leading to subconscious language acquisition and increased confidence in their English language usage through practical experience.

Recommendations of the Study

Considering the findings of the present study, the subsequent recommendations are put forth:

1. Course designers should:

- prioritize EFL speaking skills, including fluency, pragmatic, and accuracy skills, when designing English language programs for the preparatory stage.
- place greater emphasis on addressing speaking anxiety during the development of preparatory stage English language curricula.
- incorporate dramatic activities into English language curricula.

2. EFL Teachers should:

- be prepared to model drama techniques and to give explanations during modeling these techniques.

- facilitate opportunities for students to engage in drama activities and techniques that will aid in bolstering their speaking skills and decreasing their speaking anxiety.
- clearly convey the critical role that speaking skills play in the EFL context to the students.
- exemplify the benefits of utilizing drama techniques, as these approaches facilitate adherence to current trends in TEFL.

3. School administrators should:

- equip classrooms with supplementary materials.
- organize the classroom physical environment to support the effective implementation of the drama techniques and activities.

Suggestions for Further Research

Considering the delimitations and findings of the present study, the subsequent areas are recommended for additional investigation:

- Exploring the impact of implementing drama techniques on improving speaking skills among EFL primary stage students.
- Exploring the impact of implementing drama techniques on enhancing speaking skills among university EFL majors.
- Investigating the impact of implementing drama techniques on enhancing different language skills (listening, reading, and writing).
- Finding out the impact of implementing drama techniques on developing students' attitudes towards EFL speaking.

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