

Effects of Process Drama on English Speaking Competence among Undergraduate EFL Learners in China

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Abstract

Process drama has been widely utilized in educational settings to enhance student engagement and achieve communicative goals. Despite its growing application, there is limited empirical evidence assessing its effectiveness specifically for improving English as a Foreign Language (EFL) speaking competence among undergraduate students in China. This study investigates the efficacy of process drama in enhancing EFL speaking competence among non-English major undergraduates in China. A total of 84 participants were involved, with 42 assigned to an experimental group (EG) that received process drama-based instruction, and 42 to a control group (CG) that followed conventional teaching methods. Data were collected through pre- and post-tests evaluating speaking competence. The analysis employed paired samples t-tests, independent t-tests, and ANCOVA to compare the pre- and post-test results. The results demonstrated significant improvements in speaking competence in both groups; however, ANCOVA revealed that the EG exhibited significantly greater improvement compared to the CG ($p = .003$). This study confirms that process drama is significantly more effective than conventional teaching methods in enhancing English speaking competence, providing novel insights into the specific benefits of process drama, highlighting its potential to address the limitations of traditional teaching approaches and offering a valuable contribution to the field.

Keywords: process drama, English speaking competence, EFL learner

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Effective English speaking learning requires high-quality instruction, engaging input, and opportunities for meaningful output, as these elements are crucial for both progress and sustained motivation in language study (Oroujlou & Vahedi, 2011). Numerous studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of drama pedagogy in facilitating target language communication and engaging students in reflective, constructivist, and active learning in the classroom (Bsharat & Behak, 2021; Gktrk et al., 2020; Iamsaard & Kerdpol, 2015; Sirisrimangkorn, 2018; Wongsas & Son, 2022). Among the various categories of drama pedagogy, process drama (PD) stands out as particularly suitable for promoting adaptability, fluency, and communicative competence (Araki & Raphael, 2018; Kao & O'Neill, 1998; Park, 2015). Process drama, unlike scripted performances, is an open-ended and creative pedagogical approach that encourages learners to actively participate and engage in co-constructed, imagined dramatic worlds (Hulse & Owens, 2019). By placing language in a contextualized setting, process drama provides learners with real-life communication experiences and builds their confidence to navigate the world beyond the classroom. It offers a dynamic learning environment where students can apply their language skills, interact with peers, and develop their communicative abilities. Therefore, process drama holds great potential for enhancing English speaking competence by immersing learners in authentic and interactive language experiences.

China has emphasized the value of learning English as a foreign language (EFL) at early age. However, EFL learners suffer higher levels of English-speaking anxiety, compared to international samples (Amoah & Yeboah, 2021), largely due to the dominance of teachers in classroom discourse, which often relegates students to peripheral roles. This lack of interactive engagement and effective instruction results in decontextualized language acquisition, insufficient speaking practice, and increased anxiety towards English. Driven by the need to find an alternative to the conventional English language teaching method and cater to the specific needs of Chinese EFL learners, this study focuses on process drama as an alternative approach that emphasizes interactive and open-ended language development.

While previous studies have explored the impact of process drama within EFL contexts, which revealed the core strengths of process drama in enhancing EFL learners' language skills (Luo et al., 2024), there is limited empirical evidence evaluating the effectiveness of process drama on English-speaking competence improvement. The extensive utilization of process drama in various countries (e.g., Turkey, Singapore, Japan, Australia, Russia, etc.) and diverse student samples (e.g., primary students, high school students, undergraduates, etc.) in prior research. The existing literature still lacks substantial evidence within the context of China, particularly

concerning tertiary level students. Therefore, this study aims to address this gap by investigating the impact of process drama on enhancing English-speaking competence among undergraduate EFL learners in the Chinese context. It seeks to identify if process drama can improve the English speaking competence of Chinese EFL tertiary learners, enabling them to better prepare for real-life communication.

1.2 Literature Review

Kao and O'Neill (1998) describe process drama as a pedagogical approach that surpasses short-term, teacher-led drama exercises. It emphasizes an extended duration of the drama, incorporating the ideas, negotiations, and responses of all participants to promote social, intellectual, and linguistic development. In a similar, Hulse and Owens (2017) define process drama as a kind of non-exhibitional and process-oriented form of drama, which encourages participants to utilize English in meaningful contexts, fostering the imagination, enactment, and reflection on both real and imagined experiences within a stress-free and supportive environment.

Process drama is an interactive teaching approach that utilizes extended, non-exhibitional dramatic world, to engage participants in meaningful, language-rich contexts. This method fosters social, intellectual, and linguistic development through immersive role-playing, improvisation, reflection, and collaboration, creating a stress-free environment for EFL learners to practice communication. By immersing all participants in a dramatic world, the process compasses four stages (Neelands & Goode, 2015), namely experience/source, framing action through conversations, focus, and reflection (see figure 1). First, participants immerse themselves in an experience or source material (pre-text) to establish a foundation for dramatic exploration, discussing personal, social, and cultural issues related to it. Next, they actively engage with the pre-text through various dramatic conventions, which are selected based on educational goals, participant engagement, and cultural relevance. During the focus phase, participants' awareness shifts as they experience the drama in the "here and now," with the teacher guiding their focus through their choices. Finally, after each episode, participants reflect on their actions and experiences, culminating in a comprehensive reflection to debrief and extract meaning from the entire dramatic journey. This approach allows them to assume different roles throughout the process, engaging in arguments, discussions, and negotiations using the target language.

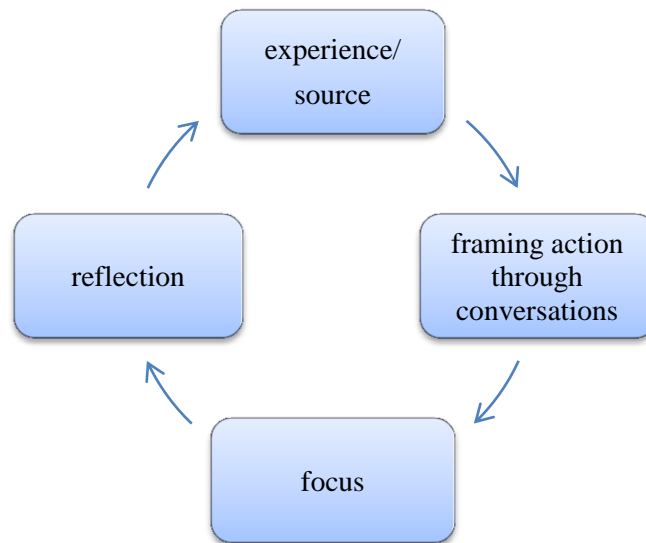


Figure 1. Process Drama learning circle from Neelands and Goode (2015)

Stinson and Freebody's (2006) conducted a study involving EFL students in four high schools in Singapore, wherein they observed substantial advancements in English speaking skills resulting from process drama classes. Their findings suggest that process drama can serve as a powerful teaching method for enhancing oral language proficiency, applicable across diverse educational settings. In an endeavor to elucidate the impact of process drama on oral communication, Stinson (2015) conducted an explanatory case study in an Australian primary school, implementing process drama within a dialogic classroom environment. This meticulous investigation unveiled four critical dimensions of oral communicative skills: functional, dialogical, linguistic, and paralinguistic, highlighting the multifaceted nature of students' oral competence and expression. The findings of Stinson's decisively established that the application of process drama exerted a positive influence on students' oral communication skills, significantly improving their abilities and fostering greater intercultural awareness. However, the absence of formal pre- and post-tests in both of Stinson's studies, which limits the capacity to provide definitive experimental evidence concerning the assessment of participants' oral communication proficiency. Furthermore, the study devised a preliminary "oracy" checklist to gauge the impact of process drama, which warrants further analysis and refinement to validate its efficacy as an assessment tool.

In another study, Coleman (2005) conducted a quasi-experiment involving Korean EFL students, wherein significant improvements in

English speaking skills were observed from pretest to posttest following a 5-day intensive drama-based program. Similarly, Gabitova, Shayakhmetova, and Beisembayeva (2018) undertook an experimental study to investigate the effect of drama techniques on communicative skills among 60 Russian undergraduates. Utilizing a pre-and post-test approach to measure students' speaking proficiency, they found that the experimental group exhibited enhanced abilities in speaking with greater accuracy, fluency, and expressiveness compared to the control group. Nonetheless, process drama just represents one of the techniques explored in their experiment, thereby limiting the comprehensive and conclusive evidence pertaining specifically to the impact of process drama on students' speaking competence.

In the context of tertiary education, process drama has been utilized to enhance undergraduates' speaking competence, with a specific focus on alleviating speaking anxiety. Addressing the English learning experience of Japanese university students, who often encounter limited speaking opportunities and diminished confidence after enrolling in university, Araki and Raphael (2018) conducted a winter intensive process drama course at a Japanese university. Their qualitative study highlighted the efficacy of process drama as a pedagogical approach for overcoming students' psychological barriers to speaking. Similarly, Ding (2017) undertook a reflective case study to explore the development of English speaking competence through process drama in a Chinese university setting. The study revealed that process drama facilitated abundant opportunities for students to employ various linguistic registers, ultimately fostering genuine communication skills. However, both of the above-mentioned studies conducted in tertiary contexts relied solely on qualitative research method, leaving a gap in providing a comprehensive and detailed analysis of the specific impact of process drama on students' speaking competence.

In summary, the existing process drama literature has made significant contribution to our understanding of its impact on EFL learners' English improvement. However, incorporating quantitative research methods, such as pre- and post-tests or controlled experimental designs, could offer a more nuanced understanding of the measurable outcomes of process drama on students' speaking abilities. Additionally, further investigations exploring the long-term effects and generalizability of these findings would contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of process drama's potential as a pedagogical tool in tertiary language education.

1.3 Research Questions

In this study the researcher will design and implement a process drama class in order to facilitate speaking skills of Chinese undergraduate EFL learners. It aims to investigate the effectiveness of applying process drama to improve speaking competence of EFL students in comparison to a conventional teaching strategy. The research questions are as follows:

- RQ1: Is there a statistically significant difference in pre-test speaking competence between the control and experimental groups?
- RQ2: Is there a statistically significant difference in post-test speaking competence between the control and experimental groups?
- RQ3: Are there any measurable benefits of process drama class on the development of learners' English speaking competence?

2. Methodology

2.1 Design and Participants

The study aimed to investigate the effectiveness of process drama in enhancing EFL learners' English speaking competence. It employed a purposive sampling method, recruiting 84 non-English major undergraduate students from a university in Chongqing, China who volunteered to participate. The participants were randomly assigned to either an experimental group or a control group. The students in this study were in their third year of university and they all had at least 10 years of English language education (officially from the third year of their primary school). However, more than ninety percent of them have not passed Chinese College English Test Band 4 (CET-4), which indicated that they are relatively low English proficiency learners.

The participants were randomly divided into two groups of 42: a control group and an experimental group. Both groups participated in a weekly English-speaking course of 90 minutes duration over an eight-week period. The experimental group engaged in a course that incorporated various scaffolding activities based on Neelands and Goode's (2015) process drama model. Conversely, the control group received the same English-speaking course but adhered to a conventional teaching strategy as prescribed by the same instructor. All participants provided written consent, indicating their agreement to participate and their understanding of the research's ethical considerations.

The Participants of the experimental and control groups were distributed in the following way:

Table 1. Allocation of the Participants into Groups

| No. | Group | Class | Number of Participants |
|-----|--------------|---------|------------------------|
| 1 | Experimental | Class A | 42 |
| 2 | Control | Class B | 42 |
| 3 | Total | | 84 |

2.2 Research Instruments

Student performance was evaluated using a developed English speaking test (EST) by the researcher, which emulated the format and interactive nature of the IELTS speaking test. This test covered two main aspects, speaking competence and communicative performance. Speaking competence includes task completion, appropriacy, accuracy, fluency, and range. Whereas, communicative performance includes comprehension, intelligibility, kinesics, proxemic and prosodic. These updated criteria provides a comprehensive overview of the

different factors that contribute to effective speaking competence.

The duration of the test lasted 8 to 10 minutes and it consisted of three stages. During the first stage, learners will engage in a conversation with the interviewer, sharing personal information and providing their opinions on a given topic. In the second stage, learners will select a task and have one minute to prepare, followed by a 1-2 minutes mini presentation without interruption. During the third stage, participants will be asked to answer a series of questions related to the task they just completed. The interview will be recorded and then evaluated by six raters, including the researcher conducting the study and an external evaluator. The selected questions are suited to the level of the students after considering the students' English language background.

In the EST, participants from both the control and experimental groups completed the EST as a pre-test at the beginning of the study and a post-test at the end of the eight-week period. This allowed for a comparison of English speaking competence before and after receiving different types of teaching methods. The test contains two sets of questions, test A and test B. Each group of students randomly selects a set of questions (A or B) during the pre-test, and exchanges the questions during the post-test to avoid practice effects. The reliability and validity of the EST were established through Cronbach's alpha (0.9) and a preliminary pilot study conducted prior to the main data collection.

2.3 Research Procedure

This research utilized a pre- and post-test research method to investigate the effectiveness of process drama compared to traditional classroom methods in an EFL speaking class. The study spanned of a duration of 12 weeks, during which the participants were tested by EST in the first two and last two weeks, and participated in an English speaking class in the middle 8 weeks.

Pre-test

The pre-test was conducted in two groups one week before the experiment. Participants from both control and experimental groups were asked to participate a one-to-one English speaking test with the researcher. This was done to establish the equality of participants' levels in both groups. The test was scheduled with students in advance and completed in a quiet classroom. Students were randomized to the appropriate questions based on their grouping (A or B) and completed their responses. With the participants' consent, videotaping equipment was placed on site to facilitate the examiners' post-test score evaluation. This research combines both the IELTS and the Pillar's model, covering two main aspects: speaking performance and communicative performance on a 5-point scale, ranging from very weak to very strong. Speaking performance includes appropriacy, accuracy, range, and fluency, while communicative performance includes comprehension, intelligibility, kinesics and proxemic, and prosodic features.

Intervention

For the experimental group, the process drama intervention in this study is structured into four phases, incorporating a range of scaffolding activities following Neelands and Goode's (2015) process drama model. Throughout the program, learners engage in English speaking learning activities centered around weekly topics (see table 2).

Table 2. Outline of Process Drama Course

| Week | Phases | Topic | Purpose |
|--------|--|----------------------------|---|
| Week 1 | Experience/ source | Warm up | Icebreaker, Sharpening Senses, motivate learners, and building class climate (moving all tables to one end of the classroom and create an open space; students leaving their hesitation outside the room) |
| Week 2 | | Teacher-in-role | The teacher plays a role in the drama situation, leads the students into the believed world, and guides the development of the plot and activities |
| Week 3 | Framing action through convention | Improvisation & Simulation | Students take on roles of the characters Response to minimal directions; mirror real life |
| Week 4 | | Mantle of the Expert | Students take one the role of experts to discover and create the story of the picture Students swap roles. |
| Week 5 | Focus | Frozen image building | Create interview situations and interact with others |
| Week 6 | | Story theatre | Oral presentation of specific part of the story |
| Week 7 | | Hot-seating | Acting as audience to ask questions of the focal person on the stage of other groups, and the focal person answers questions as their characters |
| Week 8 | Reflection | Further discussion | Students further discuss the theme of the pre-text Instructors prompt some questions related to pre-text and reflect issues of real society, then evoke deeper discussion from students |

As presented in Table 2.1, the process drama intervention in this study was structured into four phases. The first phase, known as the Initiation phase - Experience/Source, spans two weeks. Week 1 involves a Warm-up session, while Week 2 focuses on the Teacher-in-Role approach. The second phase, the Framing action through convention phase, encompasses a two-week period. Week 3 includes activities such as Improvisation & Simulation, while Week 4 introduces the Mantle of the Expert technique. The third phase, known as the Focus phase, extends over three weeks. Week 5 involves Frozen Image Building activities, Week 6 incorporates Story Theatre techniques, and Week 7 centers on Hot-Seating exercises. The final phase, the Reflection phase, occurs during Week 8, where students actively engage in further discussions to reflect on their experiences and learning outcomes. During the process drama course, students participated in and

out of character, working together in small and large groups to solve assigned tasks. English was the only language allowed to be spoken throughout the activities. Groups were frequently formed and reformed to encourage collaboration with different peers. The process includes a variety of language activities including interviews, co-creation of characters and relationships, explanation, description, persuasion, sequence of ideas, questions and reports (Stinson & Freebody, 2006).

The control group students did not receive any process drama treatment. Instead, they received traditional classroom instruction and worked on simple role play and group work. They spent the same amount of activity time as the experimental group, but with a lecture-style. The stories used with the control group were the same as those used with the experimental group. However, the control group students did not have any negotiation and creation themselves during the process, but focus on basic speaking skill learning and role-playing within a teacher-centered learning environment.

Post-test

The post-test was conducted at the end of the project after an eight-week period under the same conditions as the pre-test. Participated were asked to complete another EST. Students answered different question set from their pre-test. Two speaking raters were involved in the scoring part of the speaking test. To increase the reliability of the speaking scores as well as the study findings, a meeting was held between the researcher and the external rater to go over the rating criteria and speaking protocol. To avoid any bias during the rating process, raters were not informed of the specific research design used by the researcher or the existence of the experimental and control groups.

3. Analysis and Results

Initially, the intraclass correlation coefficient (ICC) was computed using SPSS to evaluate the interrater reliability of the speaking test scores. The use of ICC was deemed appropriate due to the continuous nature of the data, which included both pre-test and post-test speaking scores (Mandrekar, 2011; Wuensch, 2018). The ICC values obtained were .932 for the pre-test and .921 for the post-test, both exceeding the .70 threshold. These high ICC values indicate a strong level of agreement among raters in the evaluation of the speaking test (Koo & Li, 2016).

Table 3. Results of paired samples t-test

| Group | Paired Differences | | | t | df | Sig. |
|--------------|--------------------|---------|---------|--------|----|------|
| | Mean | SD | SD Mean | | | |
| EG: Pre-Post | -5.89286 | 4.69631 | 0.72466 | -8.132 | 41 | .000 |
| CG: Pre-Post | -2.21429 | 3.2444 | 0.50062 | -4.423 | 41 | .000 |

As can be seen from Table 3, there is a significant difference between the experimental group's pre-test and post-test scores ($t(41) = -8.132, p=.00<.05$). The mean score of the pre-test ($M = 22.70, SD = 5.76$) was lower than the mean score of the post-test ($M = 28.60, SD = 5.00$), indicating a significant improvement in speaking test scores. The control group also showed a significant difference between pre-test and post-test scores ($t(41) = -4.423, p=.00<.05$). The pre-test mean score ($M = 21.75, SD = 6.19$) was lower than the post-test mean score ($M = 23.96, SD = 5.69$), indicating a significant improvement in speaking test scores. Cohen's d was calculated to compare the effect size between the experimental and control groups. The experimental group had a large effect size (Cohen's $d = 1.255$) while the control group had a medium effect size (Cohen, 1988; $d = 0.682$).

An independent samples t-test was performed to compare the effect of the experimental and control groups on the EFL learners' speaking competence. Table 4 presents the summary statistics of the independent samples t-test of the speaking competence scores at the post-test.

Table 4. Results of Independent Samples T-test

| Group | Mean | SD | t | df | Sig. |
|--------------|-------|------|--------|--------|------|
| Experimental | 28.60 | 5.00 | -3.959 | 82.000 | 0.00 |
| Control | 23.96 | 5.69 | | | |

Table 4 shows that the EFL learners in the experimental group ($M=28.60, SD=5.00$) outperformed those in the conventional group ($M=23.96, SD=5.69$) based on the mean scores. The p-value indicates a significant difference in students' speaking competence between the experimental and control groups ($p=.000$) at a significance level of .05. The results indicate that there was a statistically significant improvement in speaking skills among learners who were taught using process drama compared to those who were taught using conventional teaching strategies.

To refine the accuracy of the independent samples t-test findings, an ANCOVA was applied, which accounted for initial differences by incorporating the pre-test speaking scores as a covariate. Before ANCOVA, the homogeneity test for English speaking post-test was used to test whether there are significant differences in the fluctuation (standard deviation) of data of each group.

Table 5. Test of Homogeneity of English speaking Post-test

| | Group (SD) | | F | p |
|---------------|----------------------|-------------------------|-------|-------|
| | Control Group (n=42) | Experiment Group (n=42) | | |
| post-test ESC | 5.69 | 5.01 | 2.771 | 0.100 |

* $p<0.05$ ** $p<0.01$

As showed in table 5, there was no significant differences in data variability between the experimental and control groups ($p>0.05$),

indicating uniform volatility across samples. This uniformity fulfills ANCOVA's prerequisite conditions, allowing its application.

The homogeneity of regression slopes was checked then and the results are presented in Table 6.

Table 6. Test of Homogeneity of Regression Slopes in Speaking Test Scores

| Source | Type III Sum of Squares | <i>df</i> | Mean Square | <i>F</i> | <i>p</i> |
|--------------------|-------------------------|-----------|-------------|----------|----------|
| Intercept | 733.329 | 1 | 733.329 | 59.719 | 0.000** |
| Group | 119.487 | 1 | 119.487 | 9.730 | 0.003** |
| pre-test ESC | 1291.238 | 1 | 1291.238 | 105.152 | 0.000** |
| Group*pre-test ESC | 41.873 | 1 | 41.873 | 3.410 | 0.069 |
| Residual | 982.377 | 8 | 12.280 | | |
| | | 0 | | | |

* *p*<0.05 ** *p*<0.01

The homogeneity test indicated no significant differences between groups (*p* = .069 > .05). This result supports the assumption of homogeneity of regression slopes, essential for the validity of ANCOVA. After verifying all necessary assumptions, the ANCOVA was executed, with outcomes depicted in Table 7.

Table 7. Tests of Between-Subjects Effects of English speaking competence at Post-test

| Source | Type III Sum of Squares | <i>df</i> | Mean Square | <i>F</i> | <i>p</i> | Partial Eta Squared |
|--------------|-------------------------|-----------|-------------|----------|----------|---------------------|
| Intercept | 733.329 | 1 | 733.329 | 59.719 | .000** | .427 |
| Group | 119.487 | 1 | 119.487 | 9.730 | .003** | .108 |
| pre-test ESC | 1291.238 | 1 | 1291.238 | 105.152 | .000** | .568 |
| Residual | 982.377 | 80 | 12.280 | | | |

* *p*<0.05 ** *p*<0.01

From Table 7, it can be seen that when controlling for pre-test scores (covariate), the significant difference between groups was slightly enhanced (*F* (1, 80) = 9.73, *p* = .003), along with an effect size (partial eta-squared = .108), leading to more precise results by eliminating pre-existing factors. Specifically, the mean score of the Control Group (23.96) was significantly lower than that of the Experiment Group (28.60), indicating a clear advantage of process drama in improving the English speaking competence of EFL learners starting from a similar baseline.

In summary, the results demonstrated a significant improvement in speaking competence within the process drama group compared to the conventional group, particularly following the intervention. Initially, both groups had comparable mean scores; however, post-treatment, the experimental group showed a more substantial increase in mean scores, underscoring the effectiveness of process drama in enhancing English speaking competence.

Furthermore, course observations revealed that process drama significantly reduced students' anxiety and increased their enthusiasm and initiative in participating in class activities. It improves students' speaking competence by creating authentic, engaging language scenarios that promote vocabulary usage, pronunciation practice, and interactive dialogue. This approach fosters creativity and critical thinking, thereby enhancing overall speaking proficiency. Additionally, the collaborative environment encourages classroom participation, transforming students from passive recipients into active participants in discussions and role-play. This heightened involvement helps build confidence as students overcome fear and gain peer recognition. The safe and supportive atmosphere mitigates anxiety and encourages risk-taking, while activities such as script discussions stimulate students' desire to speaking. Ultimately, process drama not only enhances oral skills but also motivates students, fosters teamwork, and cultivates a positive, anxiety-free learning environment.

4. Discussion

This study aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of process drama in enhancing the English speaking abilities of tertiary-level EFL learners, compared to traditional teaching methods. To assess the impact of the treatment on students' English speaking competence, paired-samples t-tests and independent sample t-tests were conducted. The results revealed significant improvements in both groups (*p* < .001). The experimental group (EG) demonstrated a mean score increase from 22.7 in the pre-test to 28.6 in the post-test, while the control group (CG) exhibited a mean score change from 21.75 in the pre-test to 23.06 in the post-test. Although both groups showed improvement, the EG outperformed the CG, with the post-test mean score of 28.6 in the EG significantly higher than the CG's 23.06 (*p* < .001).

Further analysis using ANCOVA, with pre-test scores controlled as a covariate, confirmed that process drama was significantly more effective in enhancing speaking competence among learners with similar initial abilities compared to traditional teaching methods. These findings are consistent with previous research on the effectiveness of process drama in improving English speaking skills. For example, Hismanoglu and Çolak (2019), and Gill (2013) reported enhanced speaking skills following the implementation of process drama, reinforcing its potential in language learning contexts. Similarly, Galante and Thomson (2017) observed significant improvements among Brazilian EFL learners using process drama compared to those using traditional methods. This study specifically focused on improvements in fluency, comprehensibility, and accent.

The observed results can be attributed to the immersive, communicative environment provided by process drama, which fosters students' speaking and communication abilities within a relaxed and interactive learning context. Process drama is underpinned by Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, which posits that learning is a social process and highlights the crucial role of social interaction in cognitive development. By engaging in multiple roles, peer discussions, and improvisations, learners practice speaking in a dynamic, less formal setting, leading to substantial improvements in their speaking skills. Alam, Karim, and Ahmad (2020) highlighted the effectiveness of role-play and enactment in enhancing speaking competence, promoting cooperative learning through unscripted activities, and improving non-verbal communication. Similarly, Ding (2017), Donnery (2014), and Alam and Al-Hawamdeh (2022) have affirmed that process drama provides numerous opportunities for improving speaking competence among EFL learners by encouraging interaction and communication, thus making English language learning more meaningful and engaging.

5. Conclusion

The study investigates the impact of process drama on the English speaking competence of EFL learners within a Chinese university context. This investigation arises from concerns regarding the insufficient English speaking skills observed among EFL undergraduates in China. The study is grounded in the premise that Chinese EFL learners, who face limited English-speaking opportunities and are entrenched in a test-oriented educational environment, require instructional and evaluative approaches that mitigate speaking anxiety. It is posited that providing ample speaking opportunities is crucial for the success of Chinese EFL learners in enhancing both their speaking and communicative competencies.

This research offers valuable insights into the effective implementation of process drama in tertiary-level English speaking courses, particularly for students with low English proficiency. While the study demonstrates the efficacy of process drama within the Chinese university context, caution should be exercised when generalizing these findings to EFL learners in other countries due to potential variations in educational systems and cultural contexts. Future research could address this limitation by incorporating a larger and more diverse sample of EFL learners from various countries, thereby yielding results that are more robust and generalizable across different educational and cultural settings. Additionally, it is recommended that further investigations be conducted on the psychological impact of process drama on students' classroom experiences, particularly regarding its role in fostering a safe and open communication environment that enhances language learning interest and reduces language communication anxiety, which warrants further exploration.

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Authors' contributions

Shujie Luo was responsible for the research design, data collection, discussion, and manuscript writing, and serving as the corresponding author. Lilliati Ismail contributed by adding important discussion points and supervision. Norhakimah Khaieessa binti Ahmad contributed by supervision and overall proofreading. Qian Guo was responsible for validation and visualization.

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Data sharing statement

No additional data are available.

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