

The Aesthetic Function of Educational Drama Practice in English Teaching

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Abstract—This paper explores the aesthetic function of integrating educational drama practice into English teaching. It aims to shed light on the potential benefits and implications of using drama techniques to enhance students' language acquisition and overall learning experience. Through a comprehensive literature review and analysis, this study examines the relationship between aesthetics and education, highlighting drama's unique capacity to engage students emotionally, intellectually, and creatively. By immersing learners in meaningful and contextually relevant theatrical experiences, drama practice encourages active participation, builds linguistic proficiency, fosters cultural understanding, and develops key soft skills. Furthermore, this research investigates various drama techniques, such as role-playing, improvisation, and performance, and illustrates how they can be effectively incorporated into English language curricula. Additionally, this paper highlights the importance of the teacher's role as a facilitator in creating a supportive and inclusive learning environment for students to explore their individual voices through drama. Ultimately, this study advocates for the wider implementation of educational drama in English teaching as a means to enhance students' language proficiency, cognitive abilities, and socio-cultural competencies, ultimately promoting a more engaging and effective learning experience.

1. Introduction

Educational drama has become a popular teaching method in school classrooms, as it offers a unique learning experience by integrating dramatic techniques and artistic elements [1]. By combining education, drama, and aesthetics, educational drama holds the potential to enhance language skills, comprehension abilities, logical thinking, social skills, and the development of correct ideologies and values [2-5]. This paper aims to explore the aesthetic function of educational drama practice in English teaching, with a focus on its impact on students' artistic aptitude, empathetic capacity, and various facets of aesthetic development [6, 7].

One of the primary benefits of educational drama lies in its ability to enhance language skills. Through activities such as improvisation, role-play, and scriptwriting, students actively engage in language-based tasks, allowing them to learn to use language more effectively and confidently. Additionally, these activities improve listening and speaking skills as students engage in dialogue and communication with their peers. Furthermore, educational drama strengthens comprehension abilities[8]. By analyzing and interpreting different perspectives and emotions portrayed in dramatic situations, students develop critical thinking and analytical

skills, which enable them to better understand the world around them [9]. Moreover, the training of logical thinking is another crucial aspect of educational drama. Students are required to think quickly, make decisions, and solve problems in real-time during improvisation and role-play activities [10]. These experiences promote logical thinking and decision-making skills that are invaluable in various life contexts. In addition to language and cognitive skills, educational drama plays a significant role in the development of social skills. Through collaborative work, cooperation, and respect for different viewpoints, students learn to work effectively in teams and build positive relationships. They also develop empathy and emotional intelligence as they explore different characters and their motivations. Moreover, educational drama contributes to the establishment of correct ideologies and values. Through the exploration of various themes, students are exposed to different perspectives, ethical dilemmas, and moral choices. They are encouraged to reflect on their own values and beliefs, fostering a sense of responsibility and empathy towards others. Apart from its educational aspects, educational drama also offers artistic benefits. It expands students' imagination by allowing them to create and explore different worlds and scenarios. Through dramatic experiences, students develop their aesthetic cognition and appreciation, as well as their emotional

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intelligence. They are engaged in a creative process that fosters self-expression and emotional healing.

Aesthetic education aims to promote mental and physical well-being and enrich cultural life. Teachers play a crucial role in creating contexts that enable students to develop language and thinking abilities through individual and cooperative practical activities. These activities facilitate the comprehensive development of cognitive abilities, thinking skills, aesthetic taste, imagination, and creativity. In contemporary China, there is a growing focus on aesthetic appreciation alongside professional theoretical knowledge. Students are expected to possess corresponding levels of aesthetic appreciation to have a more holistic education. Educational drama serves as an important carrier of aesthetic education in this context. Various studies have highlighted the positive impact of educational drama on students' learning and growth. McCaslin (2005) emphasizes the enhancement of necessary skills for learning, including social, communication, linguistic, non-linguistic, and problem-solving skills. Araki-Metcalf (2007) also found that students showed improvement in various skills after engaging in educational drama activities. Costigan (2013) conducted qualitative research into the understandings of urban teachers who used drama pedagogy in their classrooms. The results demonstrated how drama pedagogy enriched students' experiences and facilitated their learning. Similarly, other studies by Wang (2019), Voronin (2020), and researchers such as Abbs (1994), Winston et al. (1998), Donelan et al. (2002), Bresler (2007), and Wyse et al. (2010) have also explored the benefits and methodology of using drama in education.

Unlike traditional theatre, educational drama does not rely on elaborate stage design or lighting. Its purpose is to involve more students and create an inclusive learning environment. It encourages students to participate actively, learn from their experiences, appreciate cultural connotations, and discover their own potential and creativity. Educational drama takes various forms, ranging from original works inspired by real-life situations to adaptations based on literary works. Students and teachers are placed in the same context, allowing them to appreciate and imagine the aesthetics generated or stimulated by performances. This shared aesthetic experience allows students to immerse themselves in the art form, while teachers and parents can enjoy the process as the audience.

In conclusion, educational drama serves as a valuable teaching method that combines education, drama, and aesthetics to provide students with a comprehensive and enriching learning experience. By exploring the aesthetic function of educational drama practice in English teaching, this paper seeks to investigate its effects on the cultivation of students' artistic aptitude, empathetic capacity, and various other facets of aesthetic development. Through a case study of the implementation of educational drama in secondary school English classrooms, this research aims to contribute to the understanding and advancement of educational practices that promote holistic education.

2. Aesthetic Characteristics of Educational Drama in English Language Teaching

Educational drama, as an innovative teaching method, has been widely applied in English language teaching to enhance students' language learning experience and improve their language proficiency. The application of drama elements in English language teaching has emerged as an innovative and effective approach that promotes experiential learning. Unlike traditional teaching methods that focus solely on imparting language knowledge, this approach places emphasis on students' feelings and achievements throughout the practical process. By incorporating drama into the language classroom, teachers aim to create a dynamic and engaging learning environment that not only enhances language proficiency but also fosters students' personal and social development. In today's globalized world, language competence alone is no longer sufficient. English language teaching (ELT) educators recognize the importance of nurturing students' thinking abilities, cooperation skills, and practical capabilities. By integrating drama elements, teachers provide opportunities for students to engage in critical thinking, problem-solving, and decision-making processes. Through collaborative activities and role-playing exercises, students develop effective communication skills, learn to work in teams, and acquire practical knowledge that prepares them for real-life situations.

Holistic education is a fundamental principle of English language teaching. It goes beyond the mastery of language knowledge and extends to the cultivation of positive emotional attitudes and values. Educational drama serves as a platform for students to explore and express their emotions, enabling them to develop self-awareness, empathy, and resilience. Through dramatic activities, students are encouraged to reflect on moral issues, make ethical judgments, and develop a sense of social responsibility. Conceptually, English language teaching advocates for students to not only acquire language skills but also to comprehend and create meaning within a broader context. The five key aspects of language learning - listening, speaking, reading, writing, and viewing - are seamlessly integrated when educational drama is incorporated into the English language classroom. Rather than treating these aspects in isolation, teachers utilize drama techniques to create situations and contexts that require students to actively engage with all five skills. For instance, students may participate in improvisational activities that involve listening and responding to peers, engage in dialogues and discussions that enhance speaking skills, read and analyze scripts for comprehension, write their own dialogues or scripts, and view performances or videos for inspiration and learning.

The incorporation of educational drama in English language instruction is intrinsically linked with the framework of contextual teaching, offering a dynamic approach that fosters immersive language acquisition and crystallizes cultural insights. At the heart of this pedagogical approach lies the encouragement for students to vividly enact designated scenarios, thereby engendering

a richer assimilation and comprehension of the content under study. Through active participation in the dramatic reenactment of scenes, students delve into an experiential journey that facilitates a deeper, more impactful assimilation of linguistic constructs and cultural facets, empowering them with a heightened sense of ownership over their learning.

Educational drama unfolds as a vital conduit, seamlessly merging theoretical constructs with practical application, thereby serving as a catalyst for the authentic deployment of language skills in vivid, meaningful contexts. By engaging in the enactment of scenes, characters, and scenarios, students navigate the linguistic terrain in real time, thereby culminating in a more organic and holistic understanding of various linguistic nuances and cultural intricacies. This organic approach lays the foundation for an enduring retention of knowledge, as students are not merely passive recipients of information but rather active agents shaping their learning journey through direct experience.

Integral to the symbiotic relationship between educational drama and language instruction is its facilitation of an immersive experience that transcends the rigidity of traditional pedagogical methods. As students become immersed in the enactment of diverse scenarios, they are afforded the opportunity to traverse linguistic and cultural landscapes in a manner that mirrors authentic, real-world encounters, thereby fostering a seamless alignment with the practical application of language skills. This approach fosters a paradigm where the acquisition of language is not confined to rote memorization or sterile exercises but becomes a vibrant tapestry woven with the threads of real-world application, fluidity, and nuance.

Moreover, the utilization of educational drama within the English language teaching paradigm cultivates an environment where students are not passive spectators to language and cultural insights, but pivotal contributors in the co-creation of their learning experience. By immersing themselves in the dramatic enactment of scenarios, students act as stewards of their own linguistic and cultural explorations, thereby weaving a tapestry of ownership and authorship over their academic odyssey. This manifestation of agency serves to kindle a fervent sense of engagement and investment in the learning process, catapulting students beyond the confines of traditional learning paradigms into the boundless realms of experiential learning and personal growth.

Furthermore, the dynamic integration of educational drama in English language instruction offers an enriched platform for the confluence of theory and practice. This transformative merger engenders an ecosystem where students not only comprehend language constructs in the abstract but also manifest their understanding through practical enactment, cementing their educational odyssey with a tapestry of authentic application. In this environment, learning transcends mere retention of information and evolves into a vibrant, living entity where theoretical underpinnings seamlessly interlace with authentic linguistic expression, thereby fortifying a comprehensive mastery of language skills within diverse contextual frameworks.

At its core, the amalgamation of educational drama and English language instruction forges a trajectory that unfolds as a profound metamorphosis, one where students transcend the role of mere language learners and assume the mantle of cultural ambassadors endowed with a rich tapestry of linguistic and cultural dexterity. This transformative journey fosters a paradigm where theoretical knowledge merges with practical application, and linguistic mastery is underscored by a deep-seated comprehension of cultural cadences and intricacies, thus empowering students to traverse linguistic and cultural domains with an innate sense of astuteness, empathy, and authenticity.

Beyond its pedagogical value, educational drama offers a plethora of artistic elements that make it highly aesthetic. Students not only engage intellectually but also tap into their creative potential. Dramatic activities incorporate elements such as storytelling, improvisation, body language, facial expressions, and the effective use of voice, all of which contribute to a rich and compelling learning experience. By immersing themselves in artistic expression, students develop a deep appreciation for the power of creativity and artistic interpretation, building their aesthetic sensibilities.

As shown in Figure 1, the aesthetic characteristics of educational drama provide a range of benefits and advantages in the field of English language teaching. Firstly, immersion and engagement are crucial elements that facilitate language acquisition. Through the use of dramatic activities, students are fully immersed in the language, allowing them to experience and practice it in a natural and meaningful way. This immersive approach creates an environment where students become active participants in their learning, rather than passive recipients of information. As a result, they are more motivated, focused, and invested in the learning process. Furthermore, educational drama enables students to establish a deep emotional connection with the language. By engaging with characters and exploring different roles, students develop a sense of empathy and emotional intelligence. They are encouraged to understand and express complex emotions, which in turn enhances their ability to communicate effectively in real-life situations. This emotional connection promotes a sense of authenticity in language use, as students are able to convey their thoughts and feelings in a more genuine and natural manner. Creativity and expression play a significant role in educational drama as well. Through improvisation, role-plays, and storytelling, students are given the freedom to think imaginatively and explore different perspectives. This artistic expression not only enhances their linguistic skills but also encourages critical thinking and problem-solving abilities. Students learn to be flexible, adapt to new situations, and think on their feet, all of which are valuable skills that extend beyond the language classroom.

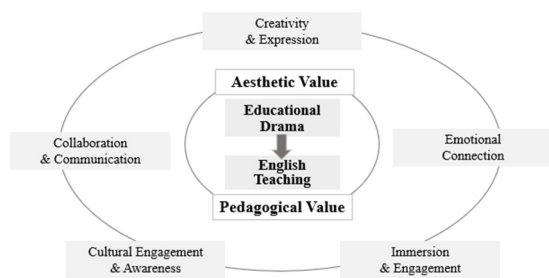


Fig.1 Aesthetic Characteristics of Educational Drama in English Language Teaching

Collaboration and communication are another important aspect of educational drama. By working in groups and performing together, students learn to effectively communicate, listen actively, and respect each other's ideas. They develop essential social skills, such as teamwork, negotiation, and conflict resolution. Additionally, the collaborative nature of educational drama promotes peer interaction and feedback, enabling students to learn from their peers and enhance their language abilities through dialogue and dialogue. Lastly, educational drama promotes cultural engagement and awareness. Through the exploration of cultural themes and contexts, students develop an understanding and appreciation for different cultures and civilizations. They gain insights into the customs, traditions, and values of various societies, which ultimately fosters intercultural competence and sensitivity. By engaging with diverse cultural perspectives, students develop the skills necessary to navigate and communicate effectively in a globalized world.

3. Case Study: Leveraging Educational Drama in English Teaching to Foster Students' Aesthetic Abilities

The integration of educational drama elements within an English classroom setting promotes the fusion of thoughts and language skills through dramatic performance. By transforming monotonous textual content into vivid character images, students can actively experience specific situations through theatrical acts. This approach creates a relaxed and enjoyable learning atmosphere, facilitating the internalization and application of language knowledge, while simultaneously evoking emotional resonance during performances. One practical application of educational drama is the utilization of Reader's Theater, a teaching method that incorporates theatrical performances based on written materials to enhance students' oral and reading skills.

In Reader's Theater, two or more participants hold scripts while either standing or sitting, delivering the play's content without the need for memorization. In an environment free from tension, these readers utilize their voices to effectively communicate emotions and messages. The audience absorbs information through attentive listening and observation, constructing their own imaginative artistic realm. In this specific case, the teacher adeptly adapted the renowned English tale, "The Emperor's New Clothes," into a three-act script suitable

for Reader's Theater, seamlessly integrating it into the educational process. The process of modifying the script evolves from mere emulation to creative expression. Given that the original text adopts a narrative style, its transformation into the Reader's Theater format necessitates the augmentation of character-specific dialogue as a primary step [16-19]. This includes tailored vocabulary and tonal phrases aligned with the characters' attributes and psychological traits within the text. Furthermore, distinguishing itself from conventional stage scripts, Reader's Theater often relies on the repetition of select language to establish the desired ambiance and underscore particular elements. Lastly, the structure of the Reader's Theater script plays a pivotal role in visually showcasing the story's progression and narrative hierarchy. Once the script is prepared, it can be seamlessly integrated into the teaching practice.

The teaching of "The Emperor's New Clothes" is divided into two sessions. In the first session, students engage in intensive reading of the story, comprehending and acquiring unfamiliar and challenging vocabulary within the context. They grasp the narrative's structure and basic framework, reflecting upon fundamental questions related to the story [11-15]. Additionally, they rehearse the script in preparation for the second session. During the second session, Reader's Theater is incorporated into the lesson. The teacher initiates the activity by guiding students to recall the characters and key events of the story through visual stimuli. Using story pictures and keywords, students summarize the main plot, achieving the objectives of perception and review. Subsequently, students engage in Reader's Theater, orally interpreting and performing the story, aiming to enhance reading fluency and internalize their learning. Through the process of role-playing, students develop a deeper understanding of the characters' images and traits. After the Reader's Theater session concludes, students engage in self-assessment and group evaluations, identifying the best performing groups and individuals. The teacher then provides overall feedback. This self and peer evaluation process enables students to identify and analyze their own shortcomings, fostering introspection and thoughtful consideration on how to improve and enhance their abilities. Following the evaluation phase, the teacher stimulates students' reflection on the characters' traits through several questions, such as: "What kind of person is the emperor?" "What kind of people are the two scoundrels?" "What kind of people are the ministers?" "What kind of person is the child?" Working in small groups, students explore and discuss the character images and traits of their assigned roles, analyzing how the con artists manage to deceive others, why the emperor deludes himself, why the ministers dare not speak the truth, and how the child fearlessly speaks the truth, thereby highlighting the story's theme of "being true to oneself."

Through group activities, students explore the themes of the story and vividly and smoothly read and perform the story in the form of a Reader's Theater. Through role-playing, they gain a deeper understanding of the characters. In the process of interpretation, they develop a profound understanding of the emperor's incompetence, the hypocritical nature of the officials, their deceitfulness, and

foolishness. They also recognize that the intelligence of the fraudster is not used for good. The students unanimously reject the notion of the fraudster's "cleverness" and commend the qualities of selflessness, fearlessness, and innocence in daring to expose falsehood. They establish the right values, delve deeper, and explore the underlying meaning of the story, which is to "be true to oneself."

The utilization of Reader's Theater as an educational tool within classroom activities has served as a compelling demonstration of its multifaceted impact on students, wherein it amplifies their performing talents and cultivates a deeper interest in the learning process. This case not only showcases the transformative potential of Reader's Theater but also underscores the pivotal role it plays in fostering the active engagement of students as they immerse themselves in the world of action and performance. Within the context of educational theater, the fundamental premise lies in harnessing its capacity to engage students in a dynamic and participatory approach to learning. By assuming the role of active participants, students not only become beneficiaries of knowledge but also creators of expressive interpretations, thus fostering a more organic and immersive educational experience. Attuned to their innate proclivity for imitation and performance, children readily embrace the dramatic elements inherent within Reader's Theater, heralding the emergence of their natural acting capabilities while affording them a platform for uninhibited expression and creativity.

A distinguishing feature of Reader's Theater lies in its deliberate emphasis on voice projection while eschewing an overemphasis on physical performance, rendering it a uniquely versatile medium suitable for learners across a broad spectrum of age and developmental stages. By prioritizing the potency of vocal delivery, Reader's Theater transcends physical barriers, offering a universal platform through which students are encouraged to channel their thoughts and emotions, thereby facilitating a more inclusive and equitable learning environment. Crucially, the participatory nature of educational theater unlocks a realm in which students congregate to cultivate their talents, navigate diverse perspectives, and coalesce their collective energies to breathe life into stories and ideas. Throughout this process, students not only develop a profound appreciation for the intricacies of theatrical expression but also nurture a sense of empathy and understanding as they embody a myriad of characters and personas, thereby fortifying their socio-emotional development alongside their cognitive growth.

Moreover, the passionate involvement of students in educational theater serves as a testament to their profound capacity to immerse themselves in the creative process, effectively unfettering their faculty of imagination and expressive abilities. Through the conduit of Reader's Theater, students are empowered to transcend the confines of traditional learning paradigms, as they harness the primal force of storytelling and dramatic interpretation to embark on transformative journeys within the realms of literature, history, and cultural narratives. By extension, the holistic integration of Reader's Theater within educational frameworks not only nurtures the organic

evolution of students' theatrical acumen but also engenders an enduring appreciation for the arts while fortifying crucial interpersonal and communicative skills. Moreover, the exposure to diverse narratives serves to broaden students' perspectives, fostering a more nuanced understanding of the human experience while engendering a sense of interconnectedness with the broader tapestry of human endeavors.

In essence, the assimilation of Reader's Theater as an educational conduit represents a resounding testament to its capacity to transcend the conventional barriers of passive learning, thereby heralding a new epoch in which students evolve into stakeholders of their own learning journey. As students ardently embrace the realms of educational theater, they emerge not merely as consumers but as revered custodians of artistry and creativity, thereby attaining a profound sense of empowerment and authorship over their academic odyssey. Furthermore, students also participated in the creation and performance of an original English script based on the traditional Chinese story, "Wo Xin Chang Dan." This not only motivated their enthusiasm for learning English but also stimulated their innovation. Through this educational theatrical practice, students were able to narrate ancient Chinese stories in English, spreading the excellence of Chinese traditional culture and gaining a deeper appreciation for the valuable spirit that has supported the Chinese nation for thousands of years. This fully demonstrates the aesthetic and practical functions of educational theatrical practice in English teaching.

4. Conclusion

Currently, educational drama is gaining popularity in English teaching as schools recognize its potential impact on students' learning experiences. Educational drama courses are being introduced in many schools, and experts in this field are being invited to guide students in reader's theater and English drama performances. Teachers are actively involved in educational drama training and research, constantly seeking ways to incorporate drama elements into their English teaching. Moreover, students themselves are actively engaged in the creation and performance of English dramas. However, in order to fully harness the aesthetic function of educational drama in English teaching, schools, teachers, and students need to further explore and experiment with its implementation. The integration of drama elements into English teaching represents a novel and collaborative learning approach that emphasizes interaction and engagement. By incorporating educational drama elements in English lessons, students' aesthetic abilities and consciousness can be cultivated, enabling them to become active participants in the learning process. This approach stimulates students' subjective initiative, fostering the development of their comprehensive qualities and enhancing their overall abilities.

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