

## The Effects of Drama Activities on Thai Secondary Students' Speaking Fluency<sup>\*</sup>

ผลของการใช้กิจกรรมละครที่มีต่อความคล่องแคล่วในการพูดของนักเรียนไทย  
ระดับมัธยมศึกษา

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### Abstract

The objectives of this study were to investigate the effects of drama activities, i.e., mimes, role plays, and guided improvisation on Thai secondary students' speaking fluency and to explore the students' perception towards the use of drama activities. This research was a quasi-experimental study with a single group pre and posttest design. The participants were 42 Grade 9 students at Horwang Pathumthani School. The duration of the experiment was eight weeks. The students' speaking fluency was measured by comparing the scores of pre- and post- speaking fluency tests using a dependent *t*-test. Moreover, the students were asked to complete a questionnaire to state their views towards the teacher's use of drama activities at the end of the experiment. Additionally, to gain more detailed information about students' perception, the participants were randomly selected for a structured interview. The data obtained from the questionnaire was analyzed for mean and standard deviation and the data gained from the structured interview was analyzed via content analysis. The findings revealed that the mean scores of students' posttest were higher than those of the pretest at the statistical significance level at .05. Furthermore, the students' perception towards the teacher's use of drama activities in the classroom was highly positive.

**Keywords:** Drama Activities, English Speaking Fluency

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## บทคัดย่อ

งานวิจัยนี้มีจุดมุ่งหมายเพื่อศึกษาผลของการใช้กิจกรรมละคร เช่น กิจกรรมละครใบ้ บทบาทสมมุติ และ การแสดงโดยมีแนวทางชี้แนะ ที่มีต่อความคล่องแคล่วในการพูดของนักเรียนไทย ระดับมัธยมศึกษา และเพื่อสำรวจความคิดเห็นของนักเรียนต่อการใช้กิจกรรมละคร งานวิจัยนี้เป็นการศึกษาในรูปแบบวิจัยกึ่งทดลองโดยมีกลุ่มตัวอย่างคือนักเรียนระดับชั้นมัธยมศึกษาปีที่ 3 โรงเรียนห้วย ปทุมธานี จำนวน 42 คน ซึ่งมีระยะเวลาในการวิจัย 8 สัปดาห์ ความคล่องแคล่วในการพูดของนักเรียนจะถูกวัดโดยการเปรียบเทียบผลการทดสอบก่อนและหลังเรียนโดยการใช้สถิติเปรียบเทียบค่าเฉลี่ยระหว่างตัวอย่างกลุ่มเดียว เมื่อสิ้นสุดการทดลอง กลุ่มตัวอย่างทำแบบสอบถามความคิดเห็นหลังจากเรียนโดยใช้กิจกรรมละคร จากนั้นจะมีการสุ่มนักเรียนจากกลุ่มตัวอย่างมาสัมภาษณ์แบบมีโครงสร้างเพื่อจะได้รับรายละเอียดเพิ่มเติมจากการเรียนโดยใช้กิจกรรมละคร ข้อมูลจากแบบสอบถามจะถูกนำมาวิเคราะห์เพื่อหาค่าเฉลี่ยและค่าเบี่ยงเบนมาตรฐาน ในขณะที่ข้อมูลที่ได้จากการสัมภาษณ์แบบมีโครงสร้างจะถูกนำมาวิเคราะห์ผ่านการวิเคราะห์เนื้อหา ผลการวิจัย พบว่า ผลจากการเปรียบเทียบค่าเฉลี่ยแบบทดสอบก่อนเรียนและหลังเรียนแสดงให้เห็นว่า ความคล่องแคล่วในการพูดของนักเรียนมีการพัฒนาดีขึ้นหลังจากใช้กิจกรรมละครอย่างมีนัยสำคัญทางสถิติที่ระดับ .05 และยังพบอีกว่านักเรียนมีความคิดเห็นเชิงบวกต่อการเรียนใช้กิจกรรมละครในชั้นเรียน

**คำสำคัญ:** กิจกรรมละคร ความคล่องแคล่วในการพูด

## Introduction

One of the most essential skills of English is speaking (Hosni, 2014; Khamkhien, 2010; Nunan, 1999; Ramenzani, Larari, & Kiasi, 2016; Ulas, 2008). Most people utter to exchange their ideas, and information in daily lives with each other (Ismaili & Bajrami, 2016; Khoshima & Shokri, 2016). In an educational context, a strong command in English speaking is crucial for both ESL and EFL students because they believe that if they can communicate effectively, they will be considered successful in learning a language (Diyab, Haq, & Aly, 2013).

However, Thai students have low proficiency of English, particularly in speaking skills (Wariyachitra, 2002; khamkhien, 2010). Additionally, Noom-ura (2013) states that Thai students have studied English for over ten years both in primary and secondary levels but their English proficiency is quite unsatisfying. In this regard, Wiriyaichitra (2002) adds that students wish to speak English fluently, but they struggle due to many factors such as interference from mother tongue use (Thai language), lack of opportunity to speak English, unchallenging English lessons, being passive learners, being too shy to speak English with classmates, lack of responsibility to construct their own learning, and fearing of making mistakes (Trent, 2009). In addition, it was found that most EFL teachers focus on lecturing and teaching grammatical rules instead of language use (Lochana & Deb, 2016) and they mostly use their mother tongue as the medium

of instruction. Such incidents cause the failure of genuine interaction in a language classroom and it does not promote the use of the target language (Khamkhien, 2010).

Therefore, it is important for teachers to come up with an approach that exposes students to the target language and requires them to interact freely in the classroom. Vygotsky (1987) claims that the development of language learning is based upon social interaction so that the students can construct knowledge that is meaningful to them. Consequently, providing meaningful activities that are related to students' social interaction can lead them to achieve in language development (Vygotsky, 1987).

Many scholars have found that drama activities are effective pedagogical practices that provide students with the opportunity to socially interact through meaningful activities in which students construct their knowledge (Aldavero, 2008; Gomez, 2010; Phillips, 2004). They encourage the students to speak and communicate with their peers (Aldavero, 2008; Desiatova, 2009; Phillips, 2004). Moreover, many researchers (Ashton-Hay, 2005; Maley & Duff, 2005; Phillips, 2004) state that drama activities are entertaining, fun, and useful to motivate students' language learning. Drama activities "draw on the natural ability of every person to imitate, mimic and express himself or herself through gesture" (Maley & Duff, 1982, p. 6). Therefore, they are considered a natural and meaningful way to enhance speaking skills because they trigger imagination and students' background knowledge through an interesting and purposeful activity.

Drama activities have been used extensively in language learning (Gill, 2016; Ulas, 2008). Several researchers have employed drama activities in language classrooms, and they have found that these activities could significantly improve the students' speaking abilities (Gill, 2013, 2016; Iamsaard & Kerdpol, 2015; Pishkar, Moinzadeh, & Dabaghi, 2017; Ulas, 2008; Wahyuni, 2013) and they also help develop students' English speaking fluency (Pishkar, Moinzadeh, & Dabaghi, 2017). With drama activities, students have an opportunity to speak without fearing of making mistakes because drama activities promote a good environment (Phillips, 2003). Therefore, students have utmost capacity to speak fluently when they experience enjoyment while learning (Csikszentmihalyi, 1988, 1990).

However, many scholars reveal that students' perception is one of the contributing factors that motivates students to excel in language learning (Griego-Jones, 1994; Horwitz, 1989; McCaslin & Good, 1996; Norris-Holt, 2002; Walker, 1976). Students learn a language effectively when they are emotionally engaged with the activities (Harmer, 2007). Drama activities promote not only speaking skills but also students' positive views towards language

learning (Senturk, 2012). According to Gill (2013), it was found that drama activities increased students' motivation to speak naturally. Moreover, Iamsaard and Kerdpol, (2015) added that students' opinions towards the use of drama activities in a language classroom were highly positive because the activities provided a friendly environment. Therefore, with the advantages of drama activities applied in speaking instruction, students' speaking fluency together with their perception through the target language are likely to be developed.

Hence, this study aims to investigate the use of drama activities in enhancing students' speaking fluency and the students' perception towards the teacher's use of drama activities in the classroom.

### **Objectives of the Study**

1. To investigate the effect of using drama activities in developing students' speaking fluency
2. To determine the students' perception towards the use of drama activities in a language classroom

### **Research Questions**

This present study addresses two research questions:

1. To what extent do Mathayomsuksa 3 (Grade 9) students at Horwang Pathumthani School develop their English speaking fluency after learning through drama activities?
2. What is the students' perception towards the use of drama activities in a language classroom?

### **Research Methodology**

#### **Research Design**

This research was a quasi-experimental study with a single group pretest-posttest design. It utilized both quantitative and qualitative methods. The quantitative method was used in the assessment of students' speaking fluency through the pre- and post- speaking fluency tests, and a questionnaire towards the use of drama activities. The qualitative method was used in a structured interview. The duration of the experiment was eight weeks.

## Participants

This study consisted of 42 Grade 9 participants who took the English class at Horwang Phatumthani School. The participants were selected via convenience sampling method as the researcher had been assigned to teach Grade 9 level. The age of the participants was around 14 to 15 years. The participants had a pre-intermediate level of English proficiency, and they shared a similar language proficiency level.

### Research Instruments

#### 1. Lesson Plans.

In this study, three lesson plans would be utilized as a road map to instruct the students. One lesson plan was used for two weeks and the class met two periods per week (50 minutes per period). The lesson plans were designed according to the language functions relevant to the course goals. Three steps of teaching speaking: pre-speaking, while- speaking, and post-speaking were used to instruct the students in each lesson plan. Drama activities used in this study included mimes, role-plays, and guided improvisation.

#### 2. Pre-and Post-Speaking Tests.

The pre- and post- speaking fluency tests were similar. The pretest was administered in the first week of the experiment and the posttest was administered in the final week. They both had two parts. In the first part, the researcher used an interview in order to assess the students' speaking fluency. In the second part, the teacher had a picture for the students to describe. The student had three to five minutes to do the task. The students' oral performance was recorded and rated by three raters who had the experience in English language teaching for more than five years. The researcher used speaking fluency rubric (adapted from O'Sullivan, 2012) to assess students' oral performance. Three experts were asked to examine the tests through the Index of Item-Objective Congruence (IOC) to check the content validity of the pre- and post- speaking fluency tests. The pre- and post- speaking tests were piloted with Grade 9 students in order to calculate the reliability of the pre- and post-speaking tests using Cronbach's Alfa Coefficient method. The results showed that the tests' reliability was 0.81 indicating high reliability.

#### 3. Students' Perception Questionnaire.

The researcher used 10- item- Likert scale questionnaire to examine the students' perception towards the use of drama activities. Three experts were asked to investigate the questionnaire through the Index of Item-Objective Congruence (IOC) to check the content validity of the questionnaire. The questionnaire was piloted with Grade 9 students who were not the participants in the study in order to calculate the reliability of the questionnaire using

Cronbach's Alfa Coefficient method. The findings revealed that the questionnaire's reliability was 0.94 indicating high reliability.

#### **4. Structured Interview.**

To further explore the students' perception towards the use of drama activities, a structured interview was administered after the students completed the questionnaire. The researcher selected 21 students randomly and they were asked questions related to the teacher's use of drama activities in the classroom. Each interview took approximately seven to ten minutes.

#### **Data Collection Procedures**

The data collected to answer the first research question was the pre- and post-speaking fluency test scores. The pretest was administered to the students one week before the use of drama activities, and the posttest was administered at the end of the course. The data collected to answer the second research question was the scores obtained from the questionnaire and the data from the structured interview.

#### **Data Analysis**

##### **1. Speaking Tests.**

The data were analyzed to investigate the students' speaking fluency before and after the use of drama activities. The scores gained from the pre-and post-speaking tests were calculated for mean scores and standard deviation. A dependent *t*-test was used to compare the two sets of scores via SPSS.

##### **2. Students' Perception Questionnaire and a Structured Interview.**

Every participant was asked to complete a questionnaire. The data were analyzed by SPSS to find out the students' view towards the use of drama activities in the classroom. A structured interview would be conducted in order to obtain more detailed information that could not be found from the questionnaire. The interview was analyzed using content analysis method.

## Results

### Research Question 1

*To what extent do Mathayomsuksa 3 (Grade 9) students at Horwang Pathumthani School develop their English speaking fluency after learning through drama activities?*

The answer to this research question is presented in Table 1.

**Table 1:** A comparison of the mean scores on pre-speaking test and post-speaking test of English speaking fluency

English Speaking Fluency Test (Total score = 10 points)	Mean Scores ( $\bar{X}$ )	SD	Mean Difference	T	df	Sig.
Pretest (part1)	2.04	.62	1.95	-51.90	41	.000*
Posttest (part1)	3.98	.57				
Pretest (part2)	1.87	.50	1.87	-62.56	41	.000*
Posttest (part2)	3.75	.51				

\* $p < .05$   $n = 42$

As shown in Table 1, In the first part, the students' posttest mean score ( $\bar{X} = 3.98$ ,  $SD = .57$ ) on the English speaking fluency test was significantly higher than the pretest mean score ( $\bar{X} = 2.04$ ,  $SD = .62$ ) and in the second part, the students posttest mean score ( $\bar{X} = 3.75$ ,  $SD = .51$ ) on the English speaking fluency test was also significantly higher than the pretest mean score ( $\bar{X} = 1.87$ ,  $SD = .50$ ). Consequently, there was a significant difference between the pretest and posttest mean scores at a statistical significance level ( $p < .05$ ); therefore, the answer to the first research question of students' English speaking fluency was significantly developed after learning through drama activities.

### Research Question 2

*What is the students' perception towards the use of drama activities in a language classroom?*

The answer to this research question is present in Table 2.

**Table 2:** *Findings of Students’ Perception towards the Use of Drama Activities*

Questionnaire Items	Mean	SD	Level of response
1. Learning through drama activities motivates me to speak English.	4.43	.59	high
2. I look forward to learning English through drama activities in future classes.	4.33	.72	high
3. I do not mind working with my friends in a role-play.	4.36	.73	high
4. I am happy to speak English with my classmates.	4.14	.75	high
5. I am more confident to speak English when I learn through drama activities.	4.43	.59	high
6. Drama activities such as role-play and guided improvisation help me speak English more fluently	4.36	.58	high

**Table 2 (continued)**

Questionnaire Items	Mean	SD	Level of response
7. I feel at ease and enjoy speaking English through mime activity.	4.24	.58	high
8. Drama activities are beneficial and make the learning lively and fun.	4.29	.71	high
9. I have more opportunities to speak English when I learn through drama activities.	3.95	.58	high
10. Drama activities give me a chance to have a good relationship with my classmates.	4.40	.67	high
Total	4.30	.65	high

Notes: 1) The agreement of the questionnaire was categorized using 5-point Likert scale:

- 1= strongly disagree with the statement      2= disagree with the statement
- 3= neither agree nor disagree                      4= agree with the statement
- 5= strongly agree with the statement

2) The mean scores of perception were categorized below (Paranapiti, 2014).

- 4.51-5.00 = very high                      3.51-4.50 = high                      2.51-3.50 = moderate
- 1.51-2.50 = low                              1.00-1.50 = very low

According to Table 2, the findings revealed that students' perception towards the use of drama activities were highly positive in every aspect. The overall mean score was 4.30 and the standard deviation was .65 which was at a high level. The highest mean score was item 1 (*Learning through drama activities motivates me to speak English*) and item 5 (*I am more confident to speak English when I learn through drama activities*) which was 4.43 and the standard deviation was .59. In the contrary, the lowest mean score was item 9 (*I have more opportunities to speak English when I learn through drama activities*) which was 3.95 and the standard deviation was .58. However, the lowest mean score of the questionnaire was still ranked at a high level. Therefore, it could be concluded that the students' overall perception was highly positive towards the teacher's use of drama activities.

Additionally, the findings of the questionnaire could be categorized into three themes: motivation, confidence, and usefulness. For the motivation theme, the questionnaire item 1, 2, 3, and 4 were categorized into this theme. It was found that every item of this theme was ranked at a high level. Hence, it was indicated that drama activities could motivate the students to speak English. Similarly, they looked forwards to learning through the activities with their classmates in the language classroom.

Moreover, the questionnaire item 5, 6, and 7 were categorized into the confidence theme. The findings revealed that every item of this theme was ranked at a high level. The students were confident when they speak English via drama activities. Likewise, they felt at ease in speaking English when they performed the activities with their peers in the class.

Finally, the questionnaire item 8, 9, and 10 were categorized into the usefulness theme. The results showed that every item was ranked at a high level. Consequently, drama activities were very beneficial for students. All in all, it could be said that students' perception towards the use of drama activities, i.e., mimes, role plays, and guided improvisation was highly positive.

Furthermore, to find out more detailed information on the students' perception towards the use of drama activities in the classroom, a structured interview was conducted at the end of the experiment. Twenty-one students were randomly selected to be interviewed. The findings of the interview are presented below.

**1. To what extent do you think drama activities help reduce your anxiety in speaking English?**

Most students (85.71%) said that drama activities could help reduce their anxiety in speaking English because the activities provided them a friendly environment. When they studied in a good and friendly environment, they could speak English without fearing of making mistakes. Additionally, the students had the opportunity to perform the activities, i.e., mimes, role plays, and guided improvisation with their classmates that made them felt happy and joyful. Therefore, the students could speak English confidently and fluently with little anxiety. Some examples of students' viewpoints are presented below.

*"I felt relaxed when I learnt through drama activities because drama activities provided a joyful environment in the class. Therefore, I did not mind speaking English with my classmate."*

**2. Do drama activities help you speak English more fluently? How?**

Most students (90.48%) said that drama activities helped them speak English more fluently because the activities focused on the meaning of communication rather than on the structure. Similarly, the students used both verbal and non- verbal communication while they were speaking. Hence, the students were courageous to speak English with their classmates. They felt happy and they spoke English more fluently. The examples of students' views are presented below.

*"I could speak English more fluently because I did not focus too much on grammar. I tried to speak English in order to convey the meaning with my classmates. Therefore, I could speak English confidently without fearing of making mistakes."*

**3. What do you like or dislike about drama activities?**

Most students (85.71%) said that they liked drama activities because they had the opportunity to be someone else based on a given situation. They could use their imagination to act as the character they got. Moreover, the students could express their gestures, feelings and emotions while they were speaking. Therefore, they were very happy when they did the activities. Additionally, the students said that drama activities were meaningful for them because they could apply the conversations that they had learnt in the class to real life situation. The examples of students' perception are presented below.

*"I loved learning via drama activities because it was very useful for me. I could adapt the conversation to my daily life outside the class. Furthermore, it could improve my speaking ability, especially, speaking fluency because drama activities made a nice environment that fostered me to speak English happily."*

According to the information obtained from the interview question 1, 2, and 3, it could be concluded that a majority of students had positive perception towards the use of drama activities.

### **Conclusion and Discussion**

The findings of the study revealed that drama activities, i.e., mimes, role plays, and guided improvisation had an impact on students' speaking fluency as well as students' perception in learning a language. To answer the first research question, the results showed that the mean scores and standard deviation of students' speaking posttest were higher than those of the pretest. Additionally, a dependent *t*-test indicated that students' mean scores had increased from 2.04 to 3.98 in the first part and in the second part, the mean scores had increased from 1.87 to 3.75 at the end of the course. Therefore, students' speaking fluency had a significant difference at the level of .05.

This study was consistent with Ulas (2008) who investigated the effects of drama activities in developing students' oral skills. The results showed that drama activities helped the students speak English more fluently because they gave the students an opportunity to speak. Moreover, they provided a good atmosphere that promoted students to speak with their partners regardless of their language abilities. Similarly, Gill (2013) and Iamsaard and Kerdpol (2015), who examined the use of drama activities in enhancing the English oral skills of EFL students. The findings claimed that drama activities helped students to speak English fluently because the students had a chance to speak and learn with the real life situations provided by drama activities in the classroom.

In the second research question, the findings obtained from a students' perception questionnaire and a structured interview revealed that students' perception towards the use of drama activities were highly positive. Learning through drama activities, the students had an opportunity to use their imagination, feelings, and body gestures that made them happy while they were doing the performance. Therefore, they could speak English fluently and confidently. Additionally, drama activities helped create a relaxed and friendly environment that minimized students' speaking anxiety. Consequently, they felt at ease when they spoke English in the class with their peers without fearing of making mistakes. Thus, their speaking fluency was fostered. This was congruent with the study of Atas (2014), Kardas and Koc (2017), and Punsiri (2011), who studied the reduction of speaking anxiety in EFL students through drama activities.

The resulted of the studies had revealed that drama activities could reduce students' anxiety to speak English.

In conclusion, it could be suggested that the use of drama activities, i.e., mimes, role plays, and guided improvisation was an effective pedagogical practice that could help students to foster their speaking fluency. Similarly, students' views after learning via the activities was highly positive.

However, it should be noted that drama activities are time consuming. The activities need continuity; thus, the hours should be organized for the continuity of doing the activities. Further studies may probably allocate the time for all students to have an opportunity to speak in front of the class as much as possible.

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