The Advantages, the Disadvantages, and the Obstacles from Students’ Perspectives on a Short-term University Drama Play as a Service Participation

Shu-Chin Su
Aletheia University, Taiwan

Abstract

This qualitative research examines the main outcomes of a short-term dramatic presentation offered as a community service, utilizing a survey and semi-structured interviews of students enrolled in a drama course who participated in the play. These views were compared with the advantages, the disadvantages, and the obstacles students perceive in having an annual play in a three month period. Findings suggest that using drama as a social service may increase the students’ technical and professional language skills, enhance their interactional teamwork skills, and foster an ethic of contributing to society. Students stated that they faced specific difficulties during the drama activities; however, learning through drama was meaningful to them. They stated that this effort prepared them for their future work environment, and they gained a sense of responsibility. However, having a short-term drama play also consumes significant amounts of time and other resources, creating challenges for students and teachers. Students identified factors that may affect the quality of these outcomes, including participants’ language proficiency and the intensity of rehearsals.

Keywords: Perspectives, Drama course, Annual graduation play
1. Introduction

As Huang (2012) noted, “Applied drama in language and literacy development has long been recognized since ‘Drama in Education’ or ‘Process Drama’ gained currency during the 1990s” (p. 85). Classroom drama activities are an effective teaching method for second language learning. Applying drama in second language learning is especially effective because it is used in real and meaningful learning situations and often presents learners with new cultural roles. The natural spoken language in drama elicits purposeful learning which increases student’s motivation and knowledge of culture, literature and verbal translation (Chang & Su, 2002; Via, 1976). However, According to Heinig (1988), classroom drama is more informal than theater performance, and is treated strictly as a learning medium rather than an art form. Taking drama out of the classroom offers students even further opportunities for personal growth. For this reason, in order to incorporate students’ professional development with community service learning, the study began with a Senior Class Play. A project titled The Dream of the Queen Esther-1920-a Biblical Drama in Three Acts was presented in 2013 by Aletheia University Associate Professor and Play Director Dr. Scott.

The story of the play- Mordecai is a noble captive Jew living in the Persian city of Shushan. He is loved by all and dwells with his slave Meesha Zabeel and his adopted daughter, Esther. Hegal comes to him and informs him that the King is about to choose a wife from among the maidens of the kingdom, and Esther has been selected to present herself for the contest. Mordecai thinks that if Esther is chosen Queen she may help her people, who are the captives of the King. The King, in disguise, has saved the life of Esther and she cherishes a high regard for the unknown hero and therefore hesitates before presenting herself before the King. She loves the mysterious man who saved her life, not knowing that it was the King himself. Mordecai tells her to enter the contest for the sake of her people, and Esther hesitates between love and duty. As she sleeps, she has a vision! Eight heroines of biblical history appear to her and offer their advice. The first act closes with several beautiful tableaux, including a scarf dance.

The second act takes place in the palace of the King. The King tells his chamberlain, Hegai, that he had saved the life of a little unknown maiden, and that he hopes she will be one of the contestants. The King retires and several Maidens enter the contest. To the comical delight of Koosh, a little Ethiopian handmaiden who attends the contestants, each maiden thinks that she will be the chosen Queen. One by one the maidens are rejected until Esther appears. The King recognizes her and she is chosen Queen, to the delight of Koosh. A Flower Dance and Song occur in this act and the act ends with a tableau: The Crowning of Esther.

The third act of the play takes place nine years after the second act. The King neglects his wife and through A Dream of Queen Esther the wicked influence of Haman, one of his princes, issues a decree that all the Jews in his kingdom are to be slaughtered. Mordecai visits Esther and in a great patriotic and dramatic scene appeals to her to save their people by going before
the King and pleading for them. Meesha, the old nurse of Esther, loves her and warns her that if she appears before the King without his invitation it may mean her death. Mordecai pleads for his people, Meesha pleads for Esther to save herself. Esther decides to appeal to the King and "if I perish, I perish." She appears before the King, who receives her and promises to aid her people. Among the characters introduced in the play are Rebecca, Deborah and the five points of the Eastern Star: Esther, Adah, Ruth, Martha and Electa.1

According to Astin and Sax (1998), “participating in service during the undergraduate years substantially enhances the student’s academic development, life skill development, and sense of civic responsibility.” Moreover, “the effects of participation in volunteer service programs have important implications not only for the students, but also for long-range institutional policy” (p. 251). This study explores the learning experiences encountered by students during drama courses and a play. The objective of this research design is to develop a rational framework that describes the types of learning that occur during presentation of a drama and explains how such drama pedagogy learning take place. This play also provides the students with service learning opportunities and benefits, which reflects one of the goals of this study. The research covers practices through a three-month learning process which involve students’ perspectives on the advantages, disadvantages, obstacles, and suggestions students offer in a short-term drama play at a school community project.

Research Question

This paper employs a narrative research to transcribe the experience in conducting drama at the Civic Center in Danshui, north of Taiwan. The research question is as follow:

1. From students’ perspective, what are the advantages, disadvantages, and obstacles relevant to participating in a drama course and an annual graduation play as a community service at the Civic Center during a three month period?

The theme of this paper and transcribed stories both share the experiences and processes to the problems of linking up short-term drama play at the Civic Center and bring up ideas of sustaining the operation of campus-community service.

2. Literature Review

In this section, the pedagogy of drama in education/theater in education will be introduced. Secondly, the reasons why drama education shares a similar learning process with language learning are also explained. This study not only reviews different drama/theater elements and techniques which are commonly used in EFL classrooms, but also lists the

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benefits of using drama/theater as supplementary teaching tools. Some empirical studies of using drama learning and teaching conditions in university regarding age groups, subjects, durations, or English proficiency are emphasized. Based on these concepts, this study aims to investigate students’ perspectives on graduation plays and drama production courses. The examples lay a foundation for the evaluation of students’ participations toward drama, and whether drama as a teaching method can benefit students’ learning. Farris and Parke (1993) distinguished the major differences between drama in the classroom activities and dramatic performances or theater. Theater is audience-centered, i.e., theater involves considerable concern for communication between actors and the audience (Way, 1967).

Drama in Education

Chen (2012) used drama strategies to guide the audience to think more deeply, such as: some pre-activities for (1) image theatre: leading participants to do all kinds of actions in everyday life or letting them have interactions as good friends or family members in groups to break the shyness or nervousness. (2) Thought-tracking: the facilitator sometimes pauses the performance and pats the actor’s shoulder to let the actor speak a sentence from bottom of his/her heart to create the opportunity to comprehend the motivation and meaning behind the scene in order to reflect and analyze the plots and characters. (3) Working in role: role play and conceptual learning guide the audience to get involved into the roles and plots in depth and put themselves in the roles’ situations to think and evaluate for the issues. (4) Discussion: this strategy is the direct way to know the participants’ thinking and it is the best way of communication between the facilitator and the audience. It is used as a transition function for moving to the next scene. (5) Meeting: it is the time that all the participants can present their opinions in a get together. (6) Taking sides: there are seats to be placed on each side for the issues of agreement and disagreement on stage for participants to choose to sit on. Then, the audience can share their reasons and thoughts with others to think more deeply about themselves. (7) Body sculpture: the facilitator invites the audience to do the movement to express their thoughts. Through this activity, people can observe each individual and aid them in how to show their empathy and development.

A dramatic performance is 'situated cognitive learning.' Dramatic performance and the learning process are closely associated. Students’ interpretation of virtual scenarios such as plays enables them to broaden their depth of emotionality and enhance the learning process with motivation. Teachers should pay attention to the ideas, acting, and performances of students by coaching them to create new knowledge and to form genuine relationships (Booth, 1985; Mclnnes, 1985). Furthermore, drama as performance can be used effectively in second foreign language learning. Numerous studies note that performances of dramas or scenes from dramas create a positive learning environment, offering various peer-learning opportunities

Types of Theater

Readers Theater (RT) as Teaching Method

For teachers whose courses include some type of literature, another form of drama as a teaching method has played a major role. McCaslin (1990) defines ‘Readers Theater’ as an ‘oral presentation of drama, prose or poetry’ (p. 263). Readers Theater is “active, analytical, socially negotiated and interpreted through both verbal and non-verbal means” (Wolf, 1993, p. 541). Most importantly, the main participants are readers that are invited to use their imaginations to interpret the author’s ideas. Readers Theater requires no costumes, make-up, properties, stage sets, or line memorization. Any type of literature can be used (plays, poems, novels, short stories) and a narrator is a useful device to convey the story’s setting and action and get the audience involved emotionally in the plots (Carrick, 2000).

There are many experimental studies to demonstrate that using RT enriches students’ foreign language learning. Forsythe (1995), Latrobe (1996); and Liu (2000) found RT had positive effects on learners’ writing. Stewart (1997) used E.B. White’s novel, Charlotte’s Web, for children’s literature class and improvement was found in students’ writing. Martinez, Roser and Strecker (1999) used thirty minutes per day of RT for a ten-week period for second graders and discovered that oral reading fluency increased. Corcoran and Davis (2005) showed that the effects of RT on twelve second and third graders with learning disabilities resulted in an improvement in their reading skills and confidence on the platform in front of the class. Katz and Boran (2004) stated that the classroom experience showed how much the learners appreciated and enjoyed their engagement with RT. Doherty and Coggeshall (2005) utilized RT and students gained a deeper level of understanding of character, history, setting, and literary background; moreover, their abilities of reading, interpreting, and writing increased. Kabilan and Kamaruddin (2010) reported that RT significantly enhanced twenty unmotivated learners’ understanding and increased their interest and motivation to learn literature. The results found in Kabilan and Kamaruddin (2010) revealed learners benefited from RT in the following stages: first, the experienced intensive construction of the characters and scenes during the abstract conceptualization phase, Second, they participated in development of characters, narration, dialogue, and plot in the active experimentation phase. Third, they benefited from during experience of performance; and finally, evaluation and reflection during the reflective observation period offered opportunities for further growth. This whole cycle experience had a deep impact on the learners. (p. 153)
Playback Theatre

The concept of ‘Playback Theater’ is based on the insight that every character has his or her own story. It is a form of improvisational theatre that includes different forms of techniques such as ‘fluid sculptures’, ‘pairs’, and ‘tableau stories’ and so forth to elicit group members to tell their stories from their lives and enact on the performance. This technique follows certain steps, such as opening with music, using a host to introduce the main character’s story and the main topic of the play, and then the actors briefly perform abstract remarks and actions based on reactions from the audience toward the topics. When an audience has become accustomed to this way of performance and interactions, then the show will begin (Lu, 2012).

Image Theatre

An image theatre is a form of drama which seeks to use a performer’s body as clay. The ‘spect-actor’ can role-play as a sculptor and transmit the thoughts, feelings and situational transformation to different forms of physical sculptures (Lu, 2012).

Forum Theatre

Augusto Boal created forum theatre; it is also called ‘Theatre of the Oppressed.’ It is an innovative and influential way of bringing audience members into the performance to have an input into the dramatic action. Boal applied ‘simultaneous dramaturgy’ as a process to make the actors or audience members able to stop a performance because characters were being oppressed in a short scene by audience’s suggestions in an attempt to change the outcome (Boal, 2005). For example, when the facts of the actor participants’ true stories cannot be changed in real life, the joker and actor-teacher can lead audience members to change the outcome and have the interactions with the actors or use role-play to take part in the drama to discuss the issues and plots to change the dramatic action (Lu, 2012).

Newspaper Theatre

Newspaper Theatre may be defined as a system of techniques and methods devised to give a term for a theatrical form presenting factual information on newspapers or articles (Lu, 2012). The drama and applied theater share very similar techniques and some skills are overlapping.
Drama/Theater in Education as Process Learning

Process drama developed primarily from the work of Brian Way, Dorothy Heathcote, and Gavin Bolton. It is a dynamic way for teachers to reflect in action with novel approaches, and requires learners to embrace every culture in the world. It relies on building belief as students create their own imagined worlds with co-participation. Process drama is a method of teaching and learning drama where both the students and teachers are working in and out of roles. School settings usually involve the whole class working with the teacher in made up scenarios. When they are working in process drama, the students and teachers work together to create an imaginary dramatic world where issues are considered and problems can be solved. In this world they work together to explore problems and issues (Aitken, Fraser, & Price, 2007; Heathcote & Bolton, 1995). It focuses on the process of dramatic enactment for learners not for audiences (Way, 1967). The word ‘process’ usually indicates a continuing event, unfinished product that implies conclusion, result, and a finished goal (Andersen, 2001). Learner self-expression is the important outcome of drama in the classroom. This process allows the learners to combine and to translate thoughts into a personally meaningful form.

Drama and Creative Pedagogy

One of the educational objectives of drama is creativity and it is powerful in fostering students’ development in creative thinking, social skills, problem-solving skills and language development (Lin, 2012). The core characteristics of creativity are self-determination, innovation, action, development, depth, risk, being imaginative, posing questions, and play (Craft, 2001). Creative drama is a spontaneous impromptu classroom activity; in other words, through participants’ body dynamics, ad hoc pantomime, feelings, situation dialogue, and various drama applications including pretending, imagining and using body, sound and expressions, facing, analyzing and solving problems through life experiences, interpersonal relationships and building up confidence in turn become a learning experience (Lin, 2001). Creative drama teachers learn how to guide students, mainly aiming at promoting effective learning, personality development, and participation.

Drama and Language Teaching/Learning

Wessels and Maley (1987) noted that drama could be used in language teaching because it applied to in-depth communication skills making it one of the important language learning theories. The drama teaching method is currently a mainstream theory for university foreign language learning. The variety of learning styles of drama motivates students to learn; its principle is to encourage the students’ active participation rather than passive learning.
Creative drama is especially widely used in foreign language classes in many universities (Conard, 1998; McCaslin, 1990). Maley and Duff (1988) pointed out that drama and language learning shared similar learning processes. They both contained four phases: (1) setting; (2) role and status; (3) mood, attitude and feeling; and (4) shared knowledge. Actors in a play and language learners have something in common because they both need to communicate and exchange information. According to Evans (1984), drama is the basic method of English teaching for assisting students to develop their language, text analysis, imagination and creativity abilities. Hornbrook (1991) also said that drama is a teaching method to increase English proficiency which means (learning through drama) or (learning in drama). In England, drama has used four roles in the national curriculum: (1) drama as method, (2) drama as communication, (3) drama as text; and (4) drama as subject (Somers, 1994).

Fleming (2006) pointed out that students situated in the interesting learning environment of dramatic performances that imitate real life learn practical living skills. By way of the imagination, characterization, interpretation, visualization, and other acting skills, learners in an authentic, emotional drama use language naturally, and overcame the psychological fear of making errors. In addition, performance training for the sake of an audience helps students reach new levels of excellence in vocalization, projection, intonation, articulation, diction, and rhythm (Maley & Duff, 1988). Through dramatic performance rehearsals, teachers could help students to gain full understanding and appreciation of the playwright’s ideas. Teachers could coach students to interpret the drama, and through rehearsals, students would become immersed in the plot, and learned how to justify authentic human actions through truthful characterizations. The rehearsal process includes development of emotion, ideas, language, cooperation, relationships and application of student imaginations (Booth, 1985; Neelands, 1984). Drama in the classroom activities require: (1) students to use hand gestures and actions to express meaning; (2) student teamwork; (3) students to visualize narrative stories that limit a situation and promote repetitive language drills. These are the reasons why process drama is one of the best teaching methods for second language learning (Barnes et al., 1996).

**Significance of the Study using Drama as a Community Service**

Many terms have been used to describe the experiential nature of service learning: civic awareness, collaborative learning, community-based education, cooperative education, experiential education, field experiences, internships, public service, volunteerism, youth involvement, and youth service. However, what moves service learning beyond just volunteerism or just community service is an intentional focus on the academic. In service learning, individuals engage in community activity in a context of rigorous academic experience. Service learning allows teachers to employ a variety of teaching strategies that emphasize students-centered, interactive, experiential education (O’Grady, 2012, p.7). “Drama
play‖ is a course at the university and “Drama education” can be one of the course-based serviced learning activities which are emphasized for the future studies on partnership development between campus and community. The study began with a Senior Play Class to investigate the professional and practical knowledge from the drama educator and provided the insight to understand the difficulties, problems, and suggestions on short-term drama play with a community service. Importantly, this is the first cornerstone for building a mutual relationship between campus and community by using short-term drama at the Civic Center. It is hoped to incorporate students’ professionalism with community service learning and build relationships with neighborhood residents in the community and to cultivate mutually beneficial aesthetic and social results.

3. Method
3.1 Research Design

A qualitative research was seen as the approach best suited to provide the local grounding and detail required to understand the influence of drama education and students’ perspective towards it (Ritchie and Lewis 2004). This study takes place in a university setting, Aletheia University, located in New Taipei City, Taiwan. This study analyzes English major students’ perspectives on performing a short-term senior drama play-The Dream of the Queen Esther-1920, a Biblical Drama in Three Acts; American Playwright, Walter Ben Hare. “Narrative researchers often “describe in detail the setting or context in which the participant experiences the central phenomenon” (Creswell, 2008, p. 522). Both a narrative inquiry and the in-depth interviewing skills were utilized in this study.

3.2 Participants

Nineteen English department students (3 males and 16 females) from the senior play class participated in the play. These are the participants filled out the survey. The play was directed by Aletheia University faculty director, Dr. Scott on December 27, 2013. However, for the interviews were the 8 students who were the main theater actors including 3 male and 5 female students and one head-teacher and who perform at Danhai Civic Center. Dr. Scott has taught drama class since 1984: first at Soong Sil University, Seoul, South Korea for 5 years, then at Fu Jen Catholic University from 1989 to 2009, and finally at Aletheia University from 2009 to the present. She has taught drama courses and directed drama plays more than 40 years and is surely an experienced director for drama education (see Table 1).
3.3 Data collection

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 8 students and 1 teacher. The respondents were provided with an information sheet including background information on the study and confidentiality rights. The main data collection tool used was a written survey completed over a 2-week period. Each survey asked respondents to detail a relevant ‘drama play learning’ they had experienced in relation to their work in the preceding three months, including learning outcome, the main influence (trigger), the background activity or situation in which the learning occurred (learning context), and how the learning had influenced their performance. Each interview lasted approximately 30 min to one hour and the interviewers minimized bias by meeting in school and encouraging respondents to discuss both benefits and challenges of implementing drama play. The researcher debriefed after each interview to discuss responses and coded all documents. Researchers once again compared codes and resolved any differences to ensure consistency among analysis.

Table 1 The background information & Codes of Transcripts of Interviewees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewees’ Number</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Job Title</th>
<th>Codes of Transcripts</th>
<th>Department of English</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S1</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Theater Actor</td>
<td>20140111S1</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S2</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Theater Actor</td>
<td>20140111S2</td>
<td>√</td>
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<tr>
<td>S3</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Lead Actor</td>
<td>20140111S3</td>
<td>√</td>
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<tr>
<td>S4</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Theater Actress</td>
<td>20140111S4</td>
<td>√</td>
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<tr>
<td>S5</td>
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<td>20140112S5</td>
<td>√</td>
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<tr>
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<td>√</td>
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<tr>
<td>T1</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>Faculty Teacher</td>
<td>20140315T1</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. Results and Discussion

One hundred percent of the students indicated that the play production course could stimulate their interest in learning English. All the students also thought that graduation play performance was the best way of evaluating the success of their four years university learning. All of students thought that presenting a graduation play was more appropriate than writing a senior thesis. The development of having the annual play may be more effective because they have higher expectations for personal gain and greater accountability. The reasons were as follows: 1. students were good at acting on stage; the interaction of performing a drama play helped them to learn more things, such as improving their language ability, organization skills, confidence in oral expression and teamwork experience.
Only 44% of students thought the play production course should be a required course. One question asked was, “When students are acting the annual graduation play, in what areas do they think they usually do not receive sufficient support?” The results showed that concerns included money (77%); space for rehearsal (56%); students’ cooperation (33%); help with making costumes and props (33%); help from other faculty (22%); help from staff (22%); help from other students (22%); professional help from someone who is experienced in theatrical performance and directing (22%). According to the results, the budget was the worst impediment to implementing a drama play.

The advantages students and the teacher perceive in having an annual graduation play

The opportunity to perform a drama play and gain acting experience also has important effects on students (20140111S1; 20140112S8). The positive atmosphere within the learning process and the encouragement between classmates is a form of cooperation that can foster relational values and intimacy (20140111S4). After the training, moreover, students who self-reported that they were shy felt they had improved in a number of aspects: their acting skills, expression ability, English ability, the sense of teamwork, body language expression, and the performance on stage and in presenting their own acting styles. Especially, stage fright can be overcome from the repetitive drills as well as learning motivation and performing experience being increased (20140315T1). The experience of the drama play especially will be a good method to acquire skills, enhance the contents of a resume or even get a job more smoothly (20140112S8). Seventy-eight percent of students reported that they generally perceived having the annual graduation play as an activity helpful to them find a job in the future, because, they believed that after the training of the drama play they would not be so nervous when facing an interview.

Fleming (2006) pointed out that students situated in an interesting learning environment of dramatic performances that imitate real life learn practical living skills. By way of the imagination, characterization, interpretation, visualization, and other acting skills, learners in an authentic, emotional drama use language naturally, and overcome the psychological fear of making errors. In addition, performance training for the sake of an audience made the student reach new levels of excellence in vocalization, projection, intonation, articulation, diction, and rhythm (Maley & Duff, 1988). Through dramatic performance rehearsals, teachers could help students to gain full understanding and appreciation of the playwright’s idea. Teachers could coach students to interpret the drama, and through rehearsals, students would become immersed in the plot, and learned how to justify authentic human actions through truthful characterizations. The rehearsal process included development of emotion, ideas, language, cooperation, relationships and application of student imaginations (Booth, 1985; Neelands, 1984).
In addition, the faculty director was professional and detailed oriented and she asked everything to be done perfectly with a high standard. The faculty teacher observed that “as students’ confidence operating ‘inside’ the self-complacent grew, some began using sophisticated native-like accents to achieve performing outcomes (20140315T1). For example, several acting students were in low spirits during their rehearsals.” After the teacher used positive praise as a teaching strategy, students’ pronunciation became articulate and their confidence helped achieve the goals. The faculty teacher said that “the majority of the students’ own cognitive frameworks, including increased awareness of one’s own learning, developing new frames of reference, seeing and incorporating different perspectives into decisions, and recognizing patterns” were appeared.“In effect, their deep immersion in the drama play provided a counter-point that broadened their perspective on their own self-growth, their work and their relationships with classmates.” The faculty teacher mentioned that students’ engagement through short-term drama made the students’ successes in athletics, emotional life, and self-development and drama activities very interesting, motivating and exciting to the students (20140315T1). The advantages students perceive in having an annual graduation play may also incorporate the reasons why students participate in community service are as follows: to help other people; to feel personal satisfaction; to improve my community; to improve society as a whole; to develop new skills; to work with people different from me; to enhance my academic learning; to fulfill my civic or social responsibility; to enhance my resume (Astin & Sax, 1998, p.255).

The disadvantages students perceive in having an annual graduation play

The results showed that the students’ motives may affect outcomes (20140315T1). For example, the absence of rehearsing, limited students who attended this class and performed in the play (20140315T1; 20140112S6). The ignorance from teachers (20140112S8), the sacrifices of students’ schoolwork and time (20140112S5), and the disagreement aroused between classmates may affect individual motivation and preparation (20140112S7). Students also cited a few examples of ignorance from head of the school that may have had negative impacts on the organization and students (20140112S8; 20140112S5). Seventy-eight percent of students mentioned that the heads (leaders) of their school really did not care about the drama class and the annual play. Students complained about lacking an adequate financial budget which limited the outcome. They stated that the heads (leaders) of the school never showed up to visit during the rehearsals (20140112S8; 20140112S6; 20140111S1). When students went to the chair to ask for help or gave suggestions on drama matters, excuses were always given in reply (20140112S6). According to the respondents, the head of the school can provide significant support to gain more funding to cover the expenses on drama needs and allow the teacher to have more resources and time for preparing the drama activities.
The biggest obstacles students faced when acting the short-term annual graduation play

The learning process involved in participating in a short-term annual play was difficult for some students, especially for those who were acting for the first time. There are several significant obstacles students face when acting the annual play, such as (a) acting into their roles (20140112S6; 20140111S1); (b) memorizing the lines (20140111S3; 20140112S7); and (c) performing on stage (20140112S8; 20140112S6). These three were the most difficult tasks for students. Other obstacles included (d) facing stage fright (20140112S7); (e) poor communication occurring between classmates and faculty director (20140112S8); (f) weak cooperation between students (20140111S3); (g) a lack of the space for the rehearsals and the preparations of the props (20140112S7); and (h) having a shortage of helpers backstage (20140111S4).

Students think that the annual graduation play should be a requirement for every English major student before their graduation

Those students that did the drama play were mostly optimistic and positive. Approximately 89% of the students thought that annual graduation play should be a requirement for every English major student. The reasons are that through the drama practices they could improve English and communication with the teacher and learn teamwork. Drama is a good tool for evaluating language skills, and a good way for students to improve their memory and vocabulary. The problem-solving skills used in the drama rehearsals will most likely be applicable to their future jobs. Only 22% of students thought having an annual play would affect the time schedule for them finding a job.

Students think they generally perceive having the annual graduation play as an activity helpful to their language acquisition and overall professional development

In most cases, having annual play was positive for students to their language learning because they believed drama would be helpful for their language acquisition and professional development (20140112S6; 20140111S1). Some said drama could bring a professional development on oral speaking by reading script lines and their reading ability was also increased (20140112S6; 20140112S8). In addition, acting skills, expressions, natural intonation, theatre theories and problem-solving skills were also learned (20140111S3; 20140112S7; 20140111S1).
The things that students like about having the annual graduation play

According to some students, the benefits of having an annual play could also increase the level of achievement and openness of classmates’ relationships and professional practices. For example, students enjoyed the performance while they presented themselves successfully in roles and received applause from the audiences (20140112S7; 20140112S6). Two students mentioned that they could more freely express their emotions when acting out (20140111S3; 20140112S7). Two students said that when all the classmates were into the drama theme and they acted better and better each time, the sense of achievement was great because all the team members thereby were encouraging mutual learning and reciprocity in skill sharing. Finally, while the time they spent together was enjoyable even when they had a disagreement, NG time, made mistakes, or were practicing the songs and dances and so on (20140111S3; 20140111S2).

The things that students dislike about having the annual graduation play

Some respondents described things that they disliked about having the annual play. One unexpected problem involved difficulties communicating with classmates who had different opinions (20140111S3). Some classmates liked to divide themselves into small groups. Moreover, the schedule for the rehearsals was not suitable for everyone (20140111S1). The funding was not sufficient even for the post-performance celebration (20140112S7). The props were cheap quality because of the limited budget and they looked very informal (20140112S6). Approximately 33% of the students also mentioned the emotion of the faculty director because she changed the model of the play depending on her mood. However, the teacher emphasized that she tried to simplify the play script to meet the students’ abilities and added to her understanding in the in-classroom practices where she worked with students (20140315T1).

The faculty teacher cut about one-third of the original play script—deleting long monologues, speeches, and several roles. In their place, the teacher took some ideas from other, newer experimental scripts and added short visual scenes of the captives, the Astrologer/fortune-teller, and the Scroll scenes. She also changed the music, sound effects, and dance of the original play to Jewish and Persian themes, including the belly dance choreography and live guitar music. These changes were made to suit the students’ abilities and to make the play performance more visually and musically attractive for the audience (20140315T1). The results showed that students complained about the teacher’s emotional problems and difficulty communicating, however, in the teacher’s position; she tried to make the performance better by her own professional experience. There was a huge knowledge gap between teacher and students; this is an area that needs to be worked on. Finally, students indicated that three months of preparation was not enough for a graduation play. Drama practicing for longer durations would allow parts to integrate better creating a better outcome.
in the play, and students could be trained to perform more complex tasks. Because student members were often required to utilize the technical, professional, and linguistic skills of acting, the drain on students’ time could be considerably higher when performers served for very short terms. The implication for the field is that ensuring an effective match among the students’ capacity, time, and the task at hand is crucial.

**Students’ suggestions or reflections for the drama class and the annual play**

Students hoped that the school could pay more attention to the drama activities, since without the support from the English Department there was no space for performing, and therefore the drama play was held off-campus (20140112S6). Students felt they were alone for the activity (20140112S8; 20140112S6). They opined that the school needs to grant funding and credits for the drama education, expand the time for practicing needs to two semesters. They also believe that when the teacher wants to make any decision, she needs to discuss it with students first (20140111S3; 20140111S2). Future research should validate findings from this study with additional drama activities in other contexts. Understanding how differences in duration, drama activities, institutional support, and acting outcomes can help inform evidence-based practice and drive effective methods on drama education is obviously needed. Combining data from larger, more representative samples may also offer a clearer view of patterns across contexts and time.

**5. Conclusion**

The results of this study could provide evidence of benefits, in that, most of the students remarked that drama might add to their professional skills and knowledge base. In sum, drama pedagogy might be a correct method for students’ foreign language learning and an efficient way of testing students’ four-year learning performance. One unique benefit of presenting such a drama play is the nature of the role itself. Students took on a role or a task, highlighted by interaction and skill exchange with classmates through formal and informal capacity building. This function, while serving as the foundation for their developmental work within a small class, allows students to deepen and broaden their repertoire of experiences and knowledge both directly and vicariously. Students also face the challenge of having to bring about and direct change to develop more flexible and strategic communication skills in order to achieve the transformation in the individuals, teams, or organizations with which they work. In addition, students emphasized the match between need for language abilities and other communication skills in the workplace and the significant gains they felt they had achieved. Students experience greater language immersion because they need to communicate with foreign
teachers to develop more meaningful understanding of issues which happen in practice and to exchange comments, skills and knowledge with their teacher.

However, the drama and language coaching and training, external support (from the school, the English department and Taiwan’s Ministry of Education), the teachers’ supervision, students’ collective reflection and peer cooperation also influence the effectiveness of drama education. The interviews with the students brought insight, difficulties, problems, and suggestions on “Play Production Course” and “Graduation Play” in this study and it is suggested that English departments pay more attention to these two drama activities. It is important that future research should continue to assess the skills and strategies that drama education utilize and their relevance to language learning. The findings may help address the problem of closing the gap between school, organization, and drama play performances and make room for a smoother transition.
References


