

The Impact of a Drama-Based Instructional Program on the Speaking Performance of Jordanian EFL Learners

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Abstract

This study examines the effect of a drama-based role-play instructional program on the speaking performance of EFL Jordanian ninth-grade students. It aims to determine whether there are any statistically significant differences in students' speaking performance attributed to the drama-based instructional program (specifically, the role-play technique) in the post-test mean scores. A total of 40 participants were randomly assigned to two groups: the control group and the experimental group at That Rass Secondary School for Girls in the Southern Almazar Directorate of Education, Jordan, during the second semester of the academic year 2017-2018. For data collection, a pre/post speaking test and a rating scale were used. The collected data were analyzed using appropriate statistical measures such as One-Way ANCOVA. The results revealed that the drama-based role-play instructional program had a significant effect on the five skills of speaking performance (pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, fluency, and comprehension) in favor of the experimental group. The researchers recommended conducting training workshops on role-play and drama-based instructional programs for EFL teachers. Additionally, drama techniques should be infused into the speaking activities in textbooks.

Keywords: Role Play Technique, Speaking Performance, EFL students.

1. Introduction

Speaking is the most significant and common means of communication. Admittedly, communication is the backbone of society where individuals connect with each other; thus, speaking is integral in our daily lives. Due to its significance (Aini, Yufriзал & Hasan, 2014), speaking should be learned and mastered by foreign language learners because "the success of learning a foreign language is measured in terms of the learners' abilities to carry out a conversation" (Nunan 1991).

It is expected that the success of teaching this skill is demanding as it is challenged with the effectiveness of the right materials, the motivated teachers and the adequate techniques applied in classroom. This implies the significance of teacher's role in shaping the speaking functions properly especially in foreign language settings (Kaminskaya, 2016). Specifically, in teaching

speaking, teachers might help their students by creating utterances to exchange information in the target language properly (Lindsay & knight, 2006).

In Jordan, helping learners to communicate in oral and written forms is one key of the outcomes of teaching English (Ministry of Education, 2006). Hands on practice, different problems in speaking are voiced by the students in many schools in Jordan (Alzayyat, 2014). Many researchers (e.g., Al-Jamal & Al-Jamal, 2013; Rababah, 2005) investigated the reasons that may force Jordanian learners to have negative opinions about their speaking abilities. Thus, they provided teachers with a set of suggestions and recommendations on the most applicable learning and teaching techniques to use while teaching speaking activities inside the classroom. In the Jordanian context and based on one of the researcher's notices who works as a supervisor, speaking activities are not taught appropriately to the students and there are no separate class-periods dedicated for learning the speaking skill during English lessons.

Since the time of regarding communicative competence as the focus of FL instruction, fluency has been the goal for speaking classes. Drama is one of such recommended techniques since many researchers (e.g., Kurniati, 2016; Nurhayati, 2016) reported the advantages of using drama in the process of teaching and learning English as a foreign language.

2. Review of the Related Literature

Speaking Performance

Many definitions of speaking and speaking performance have been proposed by language theorists. Harmer (2007, P. 269) defined speaking as "the ability to speak fluently presupposed not only knowledge of language features, but also the ability to process information and language on the spot". Speaking performance, here, requires the ability to cooperate in the management of speaking turns and non-verbal language.

According to many researchers (e.g., Richards & Rodgers, 2001; Mayer, 2002), an acceptable speaking performance should consider five main skills that are generally recognized in analyses of the speech process: fluency, grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and comprehension. Specifically, fluency as one of the skills of speaking performance is defined by Skehan (1998, P. 26) as the "capability to produce language in real time without undue pausing or hesitation". In contrast, accuracy in speaking is the use of correct forms of grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation (Spratt, Pulverness & Williams, 2005). Grammar refers to the structures and the way in which linguistic units such as words and phrases are combined to produce sentences (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). Richards (2015) defined vocabulary as a set of lexemes, including both single or compound words and idioms. Pronunciation is also presented by Richards (2015) as the way certain sounds are produced. Also, it is the students' ways to produce clearer language when they speak. To Harris (1977), comprehension also has a significant role in speaking. For speaking performance, it certainly requires a subject to respond, to speech as well as to initiate it.

Considering the potential benefits of using drama as a communicative teaching technique to make students communicate in English, many language researchers (e.g., Kurniati, 2016; Nurhayati, 2016) have agreed upon accepting the fact that drama and its techniques are the best among different teaching and learning activities used in assessing students' speaking performance.

Role play: Definition and Purposes

Role play is defined as a drama- based technique which requires a person to take on a role that is real or imaginary in a hypothetical situation (Wan Yee, 1990). Also, Ur (2000, P. 131) gave a wider definition of role play; it refers to "all sorts of activities in which learners imagine themselves in a situation outside the classroom". The learners play the role of someone other than themselves and use language that is appropriate to the context of learning.

Livengstone (1983) discussed main purposes of role play as it motivates students, maintains their interests and accounts for mixed ability groups. Because role play imitates real life situations, there is a focus on the socio-cultural variations in speech acts of real communication (Murcia, 2001). Also, role play is an excellent technique in any situation since it helps students interact and motivates them to speak with their own words. Through role play, a very wide variety of experience can be brought into the classroom because it puts students in situations in which they can prepare for specific roles in their lives and create with the language (Ladousse, 1995).

Empirical Research

Al-Jabali (1996) studied the effect of role-play and pictures in developing the speaking skill of tenth-grade students in English in Irbid district. The sample consisted of 50 male students from two public schools. Two experimental groups were randomly assigned for the treatments. The control group was randomly selected from another school. The groups were subjected to a pre-/post-test. The results showed that there was some progress achieved by the subjects taught by both techniques (role-play and pictures) in the posttest.

Rayhan (2004) investigated the impact of using role play on improving sixth grade female students' speaking ability for the primary school in Babylon City. The sample of the study which was chosen randomly consisted of 60 Iraqi EFL students distributed over two sections. Pre-/post-tests were constructed. It is found that role play technique was more useful in teaching speaking skill than the lecture method teaching.

Sumpana (2010) did action research to improve the student's speaking skill and to check whether role play is an effective learning technique. The sample of the research was eleventh grade students of Immersion Program 1 of the State Senior High School of Karangpandan. In collecting the data, the researcher used non-observational technique and observational technique supported with a test. The tests were in the form of pre/ post-tests. The results of the research showed that role play was an effective technique of learning. From the observation and supported with the researcher's field notes, it was found that the students could speak well and improve their vocabulary items and grammatical structure. Using role play in speaking class could increase the student's motivation in learning to speak.

Arham, Yassi and Arafah (2016) examined the effect of using role play on improving teaching speaking. The study was quasi experimental one. The sample was selected by applying purposive sampling technique. The researchers collected data by using pre-/post-test and a questionnaire. The results revealed that the students had a great interest in role play. Also, role play made them speak as if they were in a real situation. The results also revealed that there was a significant difference in students' achievement in speaking performance as indicated by their score in pre/post-test.

Alzboun, Smadi and Bani Abdelrahman (2017) examined the effect of role play strategy on the Jordanian tenth grade students' speaking skill. A total of 86 homogeneous participants were selected through a random sampling technique from Lameece Secondary School for Girls in Amman. The experimental group was 42 students while the control group was 44 students. For data collection, a speaking test and a rating scale were used. The results revealed that the role play strategy had a significant effect on the speaking skill with the students of the experimental group.

Krebt (2017) investigated the effect of role play as a classroom technique on Iraqi EFL students' speaking skill at the college level. 40 college language students in University of Baghdad were randomly chosen. Then, they were divided into two groups, experimental and control groups. Data were obtained by using pre-/ post-tests. The results showed that there was a significant improvement in speaking skill of experimental group.

Concluding Remarks

Few studies were carried out on Arab learners of English (viz. Krebt, 2017; Rayhan, 2004). The studies of Al-Jabali (1996) and Alzboun, Smadi and Baniabdelrahman, (2017) were conducted in the Jordanian context. Moreover, the instruments that are used in the previous studies ranged between observation, checklist or interview and pre-/post-tests such as in the studies of Al-Jabali (1996) and Arham, Yassi and Arafah (2016).

The present study comes as a complementary one to the previous studies since the researchers investigated the effect of using drama-based role play instructional program on female ninth-grade students' speaking performance. To the researchers' best knowledge, this study is one of the attempts, in Jordan, to investigate the potential effect of drama-based role play instructional program on the students' speaking performance. The present study is different from the previous studies in the researchers' attempt to redesign speaking activities that are provided in the textbook *Action Pack 9* and design a proposed teacher training workshop since teachers themselves need to be trained on utilizing drama techniques in speaking classes to improve their students' speaking performance.

3. Problem of the Study and Its Questions

Based on the researchers' experience in teaching English as a foreign language, students face difficulties in their speaking performance when they are asked to speak and use the language orally e.g., hesitation, shyness, and reluctance (Rababah, 2005). Unfortunately, Jordanian learners cannot use English language proficiently although they have been studying it for many years in school (Alzayyat, 2014).

Considering some research findings (e.g., Alzboun, Smadi & Baniabdelrahman, 2017), some English teachers still teach speaking traditionally by asking students to repeat a certain dialogue or just acting it out without any attempt to help them enhance their speaking abilities and increase their motivation toward speaking classrooms. Therefore, the researchers examined the potential effect of a proposed drama-based instructional program (namely, role play technique) on female ninth-grade students' speaking.

3.1 Study questions

The present study answered the question: Are there any statistically significance differences ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) in female (female were opted for convenience reasons) Jordanian ninth-grade

students' speaking performance attributed to the drama-based instructional program (namely, role play technique) on the post-test mean scores?

4. Objectives of the study and Its Importance

4.1 Objectives of the Study

This study aimed to investigate the effect of using a drama-based instructional program on the speaking performance among female Jordanian ninth-grade students in Al-Mazar Directorate of Education using Harris' (1977) skills of the speaking-assessment rubric (pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension).

4.2 Importance of Study

This study tends to be significant as it corresponds to the guidelines of teaching English in Jordan which underline the development of students' speaking skills to be able to communicate, interact with others and express themselves (Ministry of Education, 2006). In view of this, the findings of this study can be beneficial for the ministry of education when designing EFL textbooks and for many teachers who look forward creating good and motivated EFL speakers in and outside the classroom.

5. Study Terms

The following terms are included in the study:

Speaking Performance

It refers to ninth-grade students' performing in expressing themselves orally, fluently in a meaningful context using sound pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar as measured by the participants' scores achieved in the speaking test. The researchers utilized Harris's rubric (1977) to code students' responses in the test.

Drama technique

It is a teaching technique used to facilitate students' speaking performance by asking them to project themselves imaginatively into another situation.

Role play

It refers to a speaking activity in which the participants put themselves into imaginary situations that are like reality to act and interact with peers. Also, it is the technique which is used in the experimental group to teach the speaking activities.

Ninth grade

It is the ninth year in the basic stage at schools when students are 15 years old.

6. Limitations of the Study

- The findings of the present study can be generalized to contexts with similar research purpose, instruments, technique, and targeted skill.
- The study is limited to EFL ninth-grade students taught at public schools at Al-Mazar Directorate of Education. The treatment lasted for two months which means that longer or shorter duration may result in different findings.

Procedures of the Study

The researchers followed the following procedures to achieve the main purpose:

- reviewing the related literature to establish theoretical as well as practical background,
- redesigning the speaking activities of Action Pack 9 according to role play technique as well as designing the drama-based instructional program along with a teacher training workshop,
- designing the pre-/post-test and establishing validity and reliability measures,
- training the English teacher who taught the experimental group on using drama technique (role-play) to teach the speaking activities of Action Pack 9,
- administering the pre-test, rating the student's responses on the tests,
- teaching the groups of the study the speaking activities selected from Action Pack 9,
- administering the post-test, and
- 8. analyzing and explaining the results obtained from the instruments of the study after the implementation of the program which started on 5th February and ended on 22 Marches, 2018.

7. Methods

The study followed the quasi-experimental design, through a pre/post-test design.

7.1 Participants of the Study

A total of 40 participants of the study were chosen randomly to form a convenient school, namely, That Rass Secondary School for Girls at Al-Mazar, Directorate of Education and they were assigned into two groups: the control and experimental groups. The participants were all homogenous regarding age-range, gender (all are female) and the same level of educational. The pre-test was given to the study groups to identify the equivalence between them. Thus, One-Way ANCOVA analysis was used to identify the equivalence.

7.2 The instructional program

After content analyzing of the speaking activities included in *Action Pack 9*, the researchers selected four speaking activities from four units and redesigned them considering role play drama technique, also, they are provided with dramatized dialogues. To ensure the validity of the instructional program material, it was sent to a jury of ten judges who are specialists and experts in English curricula and instruction, language, and education.

7.3 Instruments of the Study

Two instruments were utilized in the current study to collect the needed data:

7.4 The Speaking Test

The test was designed by the researchers as pre/post-test considering analyzing the content of the speaking activities in Action Pack 9. The test, which had a total mark out of twenty-five, involved three parts: ask and answer, discuss information and talk about situations.

The Rubric Scale of the Speaking Test

The second instrument was a five-point analytical rubric to measure the levels of improvement of the five speaking performance skills through using the *Rubric Score of the Speaking Test* suggested by Harris (1977). The researchers adopted this rubric to achieve the purpose of the study.

Validity of the Speaking Test

To ensure the validity of the test, it was submitted to the jury of ten specialists who validated the instructional program.

Reliability of the Speaking Test: The Pilot Study

To ensure the reliability of the test, the researchers piloted the speaking performance test. The test-retest method was used where another group of nonparticipants fifteen ninth grade students at Al-Hussayniah Basic School. To obtain the reliability coefficient of the tests, Pearson's Correlation test was used. The correlation coefficient was calculated between the two cases, yielding a value of 0.94 which is suitable for the purposes of this study.

Training the Teacher of the Experimental Group

The researchers designed a two-day training workshop and trained the teacher of the experimental group to ensure that she understood the aims and the procedures of the study.

8. Results of the Study

To answer the question of the study, the researchers calculated the mean scores (M) and standard deviations (SD) of the speaking performance pre/post-tests scores for the experimental group (role play) and control group. Table 2 presents the results.

Table 2: Results of Pre and Post Tests of the Total Scores for Both Groups

Group	Total Pre-test			Total Post-test	
	N	M*	SD	M*	SD
Experimental	20	8.95	2.23	16.10	4.14
Control	20	9.55	1.23	13.80	1.76

*Scores are out of 25.

Table 2 reveals the mean of the post-test scores of the experimental group (M= 16.10) is higher than that of the control group (M= 13.80), with standard deviations of 4.14 and 1.76 respectively. Thus, there is a noticeable difference between the mean scores of the experimental group (role play) and the control group in favor of the experimental group. To determine whether this difference of means is significant, the researchers used One-Way ANCOVA. Table 3 shows the results.

Table 3: Results of One-way ANCOVA for the Post-Test Scores

Source	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Eta Squared
Group	95.765	1	95.756	24.847	0.000	0.402
Error	142.604	37	3.854			
Total	9378.000	40				
Corrected Total	437.9000	39				

It is evident that there are statistically significant differences between the mean scores of both groups. Statistically speaking, the calculated value of F was 24.847 at $\alpha \leq 0.05$ which means that there is an observed difference between the two mean scores of the two groups in favor of the experimental group (role play) on the post-test. Table 3 also shows that the effect size was high according to Cohen; the Eta Square was 0.402. To examine the differences of means between the two groups on the five skills of the post-test, the researchers calculated the means and the standard deviations of these skills as presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Results of Pre-Test and Post-Test on Speaking Performance skills

Skills	Groups	N	Pre-test		Post-test	
			M*	SD	M*	SD
Pronunciation	Experimental	20	2.25	0.91	3.35	1.14
	Control	20	1.75	0.44	2.70	0.47
Grammar	Experimental	20	1.70	0.57	3.25	1.12
	Control	20	2.00	0.32	3.00	0.56
Vocabulary	Experimental	20	1.75	0.55	3.15	1.09
	Control	20	1.95	0.22	2.80	0.52
Fluency	Experimental	20	1.45	0.51	2.85	1.04
	Control	20	1.85	0.37	2.70	0.47
Comprehension	Experimental	20	1.80	0.70	3.50	0.51
	Control	20	2.00	0.56	2.60	0.50

*Scores are out of 5 points for each skill.

Table 4 reveals that the mean scores of the post-test of the experimental group in the five skills are higher than those of the control group. To find out whether these differences are statistically significant, a One-way ANCOVA test was performed on the post-test scores.

Table 5: Results of One-way ANCOVA Test on Post-Test Scores of Speaking Performance skills

Skill	Source	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Eta Squared
Pronunciation	Group	0.7103	1	0.7103	3.01	0.046*	0.102
	Error	8.747	37	0.236			
	Total	399.000	40				
	Corrected Total	32.975	39				
Grammar	Group	3.218	1	3.218	6.352	0.016*	0.147
	Error	18.744	37	.507			
	Total	421.000	40				
	Corrected Total	30.375	39				
Vocabulary	Group	2.808	1	2.808	4.868	0.034*	0.116
	Error	21.347	37	.577			
	Total	383.000	40				
	Corrected Total	28.975	39				
Fluency	Group	2.469	1	2.469	5.265	0.028*	0.125
	Error	17.350	37	.469			
	Total	333.000	40				
	Corrected Total	24.975	39				

Comprehension	Group	9.590	1	9.590	53.958	0.000*	0.593
	Error	6.576	37	0.178			
	Total	390.000	40				
	Corrected Total	17.900	39				
Total	Group	95.765	1	95.765	24.847	0.000*	0.402
	Error	142.604	37	3.854			
	Total	9378.000	40				
	Corrected Total	437.900	39				

Statistically significant at $\alpha \leq 0.05$

Table 5 reveals that there are statistically significant differences at ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) between the two mean scores of the two groups in the post-test on the five skills of the speaking performance. Consequently, to determine in favor of which group the significant differences between the means scores were, the researchers calculated the adjusted means scores and the standard errors; Figure 1 presents the results.

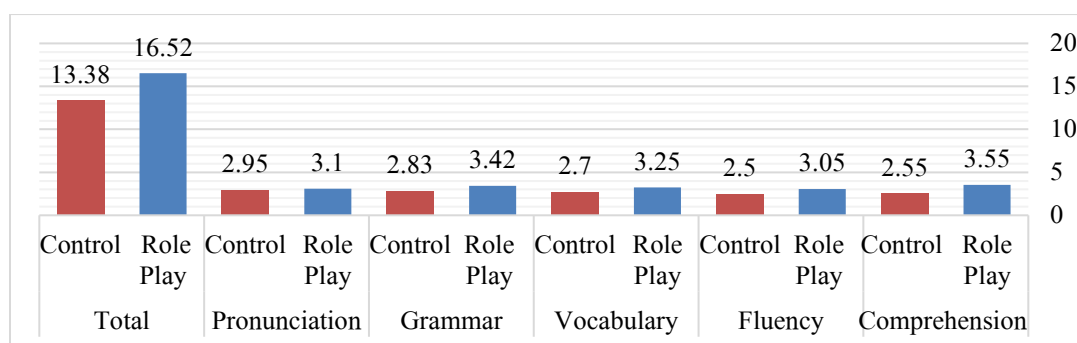


Figure (1): Adjusted Means and Standards Errors of the Two Groups in the Post- Test of Speaking performance skills

Source: authors

Figure (1) shows that the adjusted means of the five skills of the speaking performance of the experimental group are higher than those of the control group. According to Cohen, the calculated effect size of drama-based instructional program (role play) on the students' speaking performance in the five skills that ranged between (10.2% - 59.3%) and (40.2%) for the total, as shown in Table 5, revealed the high effect of drama-based instructional program (role play) on improving the students' speaking performance in the five skills.

Discussion of the Results

The results revealed that there was a significant difference of students' speaking performance as indicated by their scores on the post-test where the mean of the post test scores (16.10) is higher than that of the pre-test scores (8.95).

Based on the obtained results, certain justifications concerning the effectiveness of using role play technique on ninth grade student's speaking performance can be made. Fundamentally, the students at the experimental group seemed to speak better as they were practicing role play speaking activities such as group work and peer work.

This result corresponds with Arham, Yassi and Arafa's research findings (2016) which proved that students' speaking performance was improved because many opportunities were given to them to speak through using role play activities. By using role play technique, the class is framed as a community to support each other. In this study, the class had the opportunity to work together for the same aim; specifically, improving their speaking performance.

Furthermore, the difference in the students' speaking performance on the post- test was attributed to using drama-based role play instructional program which entails that the intended pedagogical practices were addressed purposefully. One of the characteristics of these practices was the properly redesigned speaking activities considering role play technique as well as the appropriate procedures implemented to teach the speaking activities through role play technique.

Another reason ascribed to the superiority of the role play group is connected to the pre-prepared excessive amount of practice role play activities which succeeded systematically. Thus, students at the role play group received speaking tasks at the end of each role play activity in each session where they need to follow sequential steps to demonstrate it. Definitely, being systematic and sequential help students to reinforce their learning effectively. This interpretation is consistent with Krebt (2017) who published that following the proper role play procedures is extremely prosperous to improve their speaking routines.

In addition, at the role play group, students seemed relaxed and felt motivated as they competed enthusiastically to perform and play roles whenever it was due. This explanation is in congruence with Alzboun, Smadi and Baniabdelrahman (2017) who reported improved speaking performance as caused by role play technique. It is found that role play technique affects speaker's motivation and reduces his/her anxiety significantly as in role play students take different turns in different situations.

Furthermore, the superiority of drama-based role play technique may have a crucial role in familiarizing students with the language. Thus, the vocabulary, pronunciation and grammar practices helped them enrich their language knowledge accurately and fluently. In this study, students' vocabulary, and grammar before being engaged in role playing were unsatisfactory. In this concern, Krebt (2017) and Kaminskaya (2016) highlighted the significance of role play in developing students' speaking performance as they become used to speaking more often which, in turn, leads to better performance. In this study, the researchers felt that it is easier for students to find ideas to speak than before. Day by day, they were able to deliver a good dialogue by choosing the most appropriate words, expressions, and pronunciation.

One further interpretation of the enhanced speaking performance, role play technique made the class more active and alive. Specifically, students were seen as willing to participate, speak and use the language without any demand from the teacher. Besides, it made the speaking and learning classes more enjoyable, interesting, and included shy students. Sometimes such students were given mask to overcome speaking difficulty in conversation are liberated. Further, in role play classes, students were confident and active speakers of English. This interpretation is articulated by Rayhan (2014) who assured that role play builds the students' confidence to speak fluently and accurately and strengthened their interactions through a variety of drama situations.

Another justification, which in congruence with ladousse (1995), role play does not threaten the students; it leads them to play such as drama.

Thus, it was found that the students were able to practice the language and speak freely regardless to the mistakes they would make in grammar, pronunciation, and word choice because they would be directly informed about their mistakes during the speaking activities.

Finally, the researchers were cautious from the very beginning to design the instructional program and to redesign the speaking activities included in *Action pack 9* to be closer and more appropriate to the students' interests, beliefs, and levels. Thus, this instructional role play program might help students develop their knowledge and their responsibilities while performing the speaking activities. Role play classes in this study provided an efficient mechanism for students to take more responsibilities for their own speaking and learning. This is in line with Alzboun, Smadi and Baniabdelrahman (2017) who confirmed that role play technique creates enjoyment for students to use and speak English as a foreign language which leads to taking their self-responsibility of increasing their performance while speaking.

To sum up, the results of the first question agree with some researchers who investigated the effect of role play on the students' speaking performance (e.g., Kaminskaya, 2016; Rayhan, 2014; Sumpna, 2010). They all found out that there was a significant effect of using role play as a teaching technique on the experimental group scores on the post-test in comparison with the control group.

9. Conclusions

Based on the discussion of the results of the present study, the researchers concluded that using the drama-based instructional program (namely, role play) was effective in enhancing the students' overall speaking performance. Also, there was an improvement in the five skills of the speaking performance: pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, fluency, and comprehension.

10. Recommendations

Considering the results of the study, it is recommended to EFL textbook designers and curricula planners in the Ministry of Education to infuse drama techniques in the speaking activities in the textbooks. Also, teachers' new roles should be seriously changed into providers, assistants and facilitators while teaching the speaking activities by applying new teaching communicative techniques to create more enjoyable real-life classes. Also, they should encourage their students to be more active learners and work collaboratively. Further researchers are recommended to conduct further similar studies on other classes at other educational levels and in other educational settings in different Jordanian schools on the effectiveness of drama techniques on enhancing students' speaking performance.

Conflicts of interest statements

All authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

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