

# EXPLORING TEACHING ENGLISH THROUGH DRAMA IN A LOCAL ISLAMIC INSTITUTION USING EXEMPLARY STORIES FROM HADITHS

<sup>1</sup>Roszalina Abdul Rahim, <sup>2</sup>Fahmi Zaidi Abdul Razak, <sup>3</sup>Nor Yazid Khamis & <sup>3</sup>Hafizoah  
Kassim

<sup>1</sup>English Department, Faculty of Language and Foundation Studies, Sultan Ahmad Shah Pahang Islamic  
University College

<sup>2</sup>Research Management Centre, Sultan Ahmad Shah Pahang Islamic University College

<sup>3</sup>Centre of Modern Languages, Universiti Malaysia Pahang

## *Abstract*

*This study is aimed to explore the benefits students perceived they have gained from learning English through drama activities. The researcher collected qualitative data from essays written by students aged 18 to 21 in three second-semester-classes at a university college. These students were taking a compulsory English proficiency course namely English for Proficiency (Intermediate Level). The drama competition was held wherein 17 classes contested. The competition was one of the items in their English course ongoing assessment. Data was collected from 'self-reflection essays' written by the students after they competed in the drama competition. These essays aimed to discover the perspectives of these participants about the teaching and learning approaches to L2 that could enable ESL students to use the drama in classroom communicative engagement situations. They were observed in their intermediate level classes prior to this, with their lessons being reported on field notes. In order to identify the level of recognition, satisfaction, engagement, inspiration and language skill of students, these classroom findings accompanied the essays and scrutinized the communicative interaction that took place in the classroom. In achieving the goal of the research, these two analytical instruments played an important role in investigating the use of drama as approaches to communicative engagement and their practices. In order to provide evidence related to the acceptance of drama practices as a communicative engagement approach, the data from this study was qualitatively analysed.*

## **Penulis Utama:**

Roszalina Abdul Rahim

English Department

Faculty of Language and  
Foundation Studies

Sultan Ahmad Shah Pahang  
Islamic University College

## **E-mel:**

[roszalina@kuipsas.edu.my](mailto:roszalina@kuipsas.edu.my)

*The findings demonstrate that drama practices appeared to be acceptable at the level explored in the higher education institutions in this study. Improved speech skills, decreased anxiety, increased motivation and enjoyment of learning English are among the advantages of a shared learning experience in the use of drama. It was concluded that in this Islamic College University, practices for stage drama production such as brainstorming for ideas, script writing, drama rehearsal and presentation were appropriate activities for Islamic tertiary ESL learners. Using the embedded exemplary stories from hadiths will also help create an 'authentic' meaning that is applicable to real-life circumstances faced by Islamic Institution ESL students. Therefore, it is proposed that language practitioners consider the introduction Islamic theme in drama exercises in the language classes as one of the language activities to improve the language competency, acceptance and encouragement of students to learn the language; as well as a way of testing the students' language ability of in a wider range.*

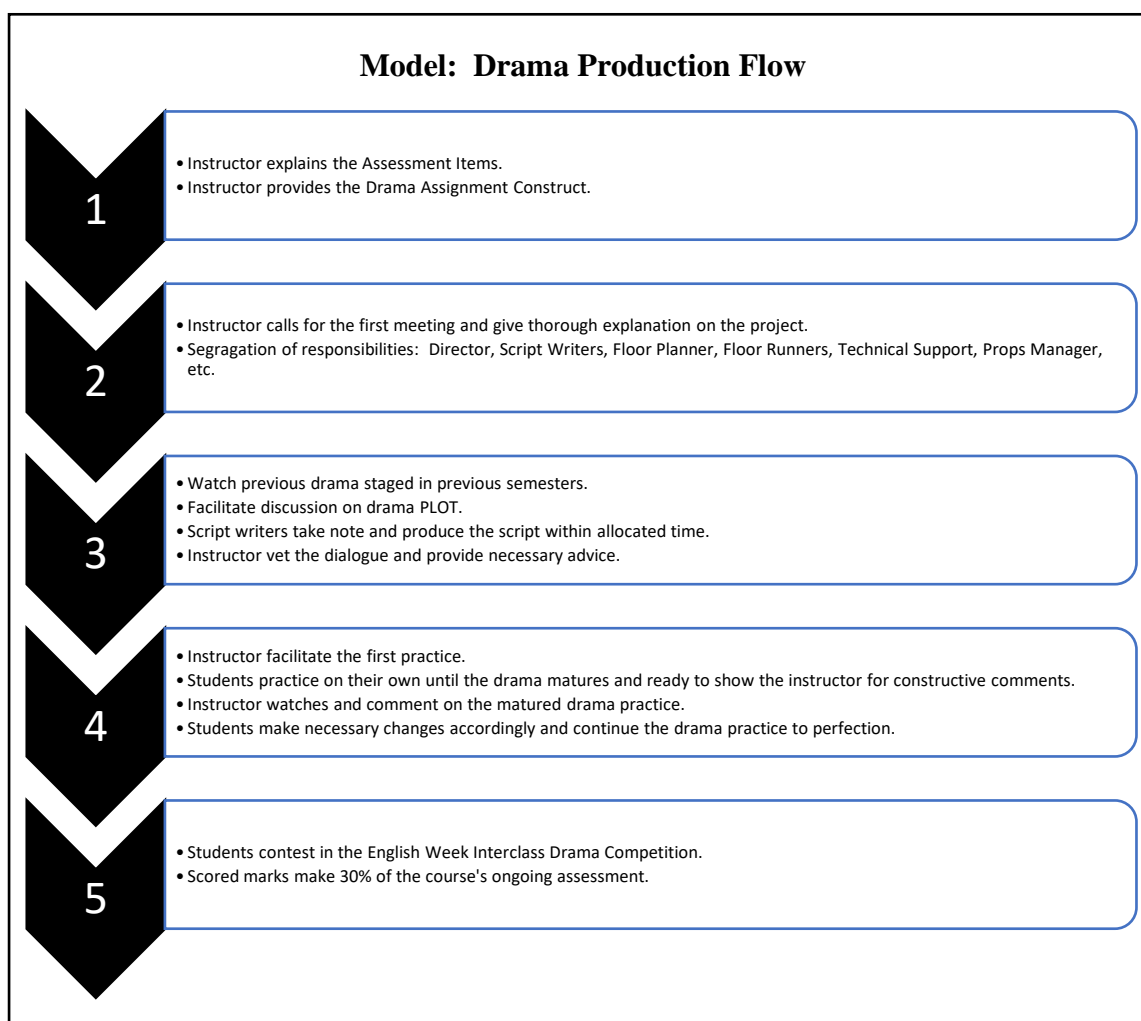
**Keyword:** *ESL classroom, drama activities, language skill, language competency, motivation.*

## INTRODUCTION

One of the main topics of the teaching-learning process has been the 'motivation' of the learners. Active engagement of students in class activities, especially those focused on student-centred methodology, is a challenging process for General English practitioners (Torrico, 2015). Drama creates a framework for learners to practise listening and communicating. It allows the practise of language to become more meaningful than mechanical exercises. Although learners have minimal vocabulary, it also provides great opportunities for them to communicate with others.

Therefore, to enable students to learn English as a foreign language, the strategy is not only to improve the language skills of students, but also to teach them the actual condition adopted from real life as there will be elements of social engagement in performing drama events. (Nanda, 2016). This type of creative activity is better taught through the medium of drama in order to sensitize students to the criteria of the form of art as the typical literary analysis would usually be unapparent. After all, drama on the written paper and the dramatic stage have a dual nature (Mizusawa, 2019).

In the context of this Islamic Institution, in order to inculcate Islamic values into the teaching of English language, the researcher has selected an Islamic theme in one of the numerous drama competitions held every semester. All second semester students were made compulsory to get involved in the class drama team. Seventeen classes were respectively assigned 17 hadiths to pick from (via draw lots). Each class was provided with a hadith which will be the foundational anchor of the drama plot and script. The hadiths were chosen by selection made by the GEP practitioners and sent to the university college 'hadiths experts' for verification, to ensure that all the hadiths in use would be of hadiths that are authentic. Each class and / or drama team is guided by their respective lecturers throughout the stage drama production. This assignment was given to all second semester classes which are enrolled to the college compulsory course, namely General English Proficiency (Intermediate). Each class / team is assessed during an event named 'English Week' alongside other assessments listed as other items in the course's 'Ongoing Assessment' document. It is compulsory for all students to participate in the drama team. Below, is a model the researcher developed in order to facilitate the stage drama in her English classes.



Based on the researcher’s experience, it is important to provide students with understandable feedback, that is, language one step above the learner's competence, but still understandable for them. In regard to this, one must keep in mind that they require a fair amount of vocabulary and listening experience in the target language before students are able to communicate. In this study, students were guided with Islamic English vocabularies that have been internationally accepted to adhere to the assigned hadiths when plotting the drama and writing the drama scripts.

It is globally acknowledged that English language is crucial in today's culture, and colleges should train students to live, work and effectively engage in society. However, speaking English, is a struggle for some students due to speech anxiety, shyness, lack of opportunity to use the language, lack of motivation to learn the second language, family background, education background, education field, and lack of interest which may lead to negative impacts on their current life as students as well as their future career undertaking (Raja, 2017).

**SUMMARY OF FINDINGS**

For some students, learning English is a challenge due to speech anxiety, shyness, lack of ability to use the language, lack of desire to learn the second language, family history, background of schooling, area of education, and lack of confidence that can have a detrimental

effect on their current life as students as well as their potential career. The findings of this study are summarized based on the problem statement, to answer these questions:

1. To what extent does drama activities are found **motivating** to students in learning English language?
2. What are the **academic gains** in English language skills perceived by students?
3. What are **other perceived benefits** by the students from the drama activities experience with the use of hadiths in English drama?

In answering all of the above research questions, the researcher has used these two analytical instruments – field notes and students’ reflection essays.

Excerpts from field notes:

These field notes were written on the first meeting of each class the researcher taught. The purpose of writing these field notes was to record the background of the students in each class.

**EXCERPT I:**

**CLASS I (30 students):**

This is a mixed-ability class with only 2 scored A for English in SPM, 5 failed, the rest are Bs, Cs and Ds. They come from all walks of life. Only 1 student had the experience of performing in a drama performance and public speaking. The rest of the class reported that they never had any experience in classroom communicative engagement such as drama, public speaking, choral speaking nor story telling.

**EXCERPT II:**

**CLASS II (22 students):**

This is a mixed-ability class with only 1 student scored A for English in SPM, 7 failed, the rest are Bs, Cs and Ds. They come from all walks of life. None of them had the experience of performing in a drama performance and public speaking. The rest of the class reported that they never had any experience in classroom communicative engagement such as drama, public speaking, choral speaking nor story telling. Those who failed their English during SPM reported that their teachers did not give any attention to them. One of them reported that their high school English teacher did not teach much in class. She was busy with co-curricular activities.

**EXCERPT III:**

**CLASS I (16 students):**

This is a mixed-ability class with only 2 scored A for English in SPM, 3 failed, the rest are Bs, Cs and Ds. They come from all walks of life. Only 1 student had the experience of performing in a drama performance and public speaking. The rest of the class reported that they never had any experience in classroom communicative engagement such as drama, public speaking, choral speaking nor story telling. They reported that they were not taught the literature component at school and were not able to write a simple decent paragraph, what more an essay of SPM standard.

After the students have all participated in the English Week interclass drama competition, the researcher has assigned them to write an essay of 250 words to describe what they learnt from learning English through drama with the ‘Exemplary Stories from Hadiths’. The table below explains the subthemes from three major themes derived from the reflection essays written by all the students, based on the study research objectives.

<b>Theme 1 - Motivation:</b>	<b>Theme 2 - Academic Gains in English Language skills:</b>	<b>Theme 3 - Other Perceived Benefits with the use of Hadiths in performing drama:</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Promoted good relationship between students and lecturer.</li> <li>* Feel much more responsible towards task given by the lecturer.</li> <li>* Able to work independently.</li> <li>* Willing to commit to the English lessons.</li> <li>* Increase of discipline.</li> <li>* Succeed in working with a team.</li> <li>* Willing to sacrifice their time for English lessons.</li> <li>* Found English lessons more enjoyable.</li> <li>* Increase in the degree of punctuality in attending English class activities.</li> <li>* Developed more interest in learning English.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Increased confidence to organize upcoming English programs.</li> <li>* Discover a new type of learning process to improve English proficiency.</li> <li>* Learnt ways to handle big English events.</li> <li>* Improved communication skills.</li> <li>* Improved vocabularies (including Islamic English vocabularies).</li> <li>* Improved in terms of pronunciation.</li> <li>* Developed self-confidence.</li> <li>* Created memorable learning experience.</li> <li>* Found learning to speak in English interesting.</li> <li>* Opportunity to perform on stage.</li> <li>* Chance to express their talent.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Developed the intention of completing assignments not just for grades but to educate others.</li> <li>* Gained more Islamic knowledge based on hadiths.</li> <li>* Problem solving skills.</li> <li>* Developed courage to accept challenges.</li> <li>* Gained new experience.</li> <li>* Developed tolerance towards difficult people.</li> <li>* Multitasking skill.</li> </ul>

Meanwhile, however, a few challenges were encountered by the learners as well as the lecturer in the process of staging the drama. Among others, the challenges were:

- Students inability to control their emotions when the stress level increased.
- Students were very often stressed.

- Students could not control the crowd reactions when they got excited towards certain drama scenes.
- Time constraint.
- Some students could not multitask.
- Sparks of misunderstanding among classmates.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

This study revealed the suitability and practicality of using an Islamic drama theme in an Islamic Institution English language proficiency assessment. Thus, the following recommendations are hereby presented:

1. Since the use of drama to boost English language learners' motivation has been proven, general English practitioners should incorporate drama activities into their classroom activities to maintain the quality of education for the learners and help them overcome their anxiety and shyness when using the language, improve communication skills and increase their interest and enjoyment in learning the language. Simulation, role plays and stage drama are among the most powerful ways to make learners talk. One explanation that discourages most students is their dislike of speaking in public. Drama practices in the classroom have a liberating effect on these students when they lose the fear of committing errors by pretending to be someone else. Furthermore, role plays and exercises allow learners to think and learn differently from their own experience. Drama activities act as the mental and physical function prompts to learners. Active engagement is expected in the activities. It is also crucial for learners to focus and it is not easy for a student to remain inactive for a long time. For students to use the language meaningfully, situations are generated and this will inspire the students to engage. When they see the rest of the class are having a nice time learning English through drama, the less motivated students will be eventually drawn into the activity (Yee Sam, 1990).
2. The usage of Islamic themes in teaching communicative activities such as drama in tertiary Islamic Institutions should be encouraged by education administrators and embraced by English language practitioners in the effort to continually improve public education. Giving a theme that is close to learners at tertiary Islamic Institutions, such as 'Exemplary Stories from Hadiths' allows learners to understand better and able to communicate more effectively and meaningfully. Another advantage of using dramatic techniques is the possibility of employing language in a context. Hadiths are genuine materials that are crucial to be introduced to the students inside and outside the classroom with the actual use of English language. The usage in the classroom with genuine resources is to "expose" the learner to as much natural language as possible. Although the classroom is not a "real-life" situation, there is a very important place within it for genuine materials (Muhsinin et al., 2017).

## **CONCLUSION**

The use of drama as a communicative interaction in the classroom is a valid instrument for improving the English communication skills for English learners at Islamic Institutions. The theme 'Exemplary Stories from Hadiths' used has led to the increase of motivation, English language skills as well as other perceived benefits. It also confirms the optimistic outlook of learners toward drama activities. In order to produce the stage drama, numerous engaging

activities were used to help create an experience that was educational, enjoyable and perceived successful by the study participants in the Islamic Higher Institution.

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