

Special Issue

Effect of Drama-Based English Classes on Iranian EFL Learners' Speaking Fluency, Class Engagement, and Self-Esteem

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Abstract

Some challenges L2 teachers face in L2 classrooms can be eliminated through some techniques, like using drama and theater. The goal of this study was to investigate the (possible) effects of theater on Iranian L2 learners' speaking fluency, classroom engagement, and self-esteem. For this purpose, 60 intermediate L2 learners were selected from Safir Institute of Shahrekord, using a placement test, and were divided into 2 groups: Those interested in theater made up the experimental group, and the rest formed the control group. The participants answered 2 speaking questions orally and 2 questionnaires for class engagement and self-esteem as the pretest. After 12 hr of treatment, they answered 2 other speaking questions and 2 questionnaires for class engagement and self-esteem as the posttest to investigate whether they had improved during the treatment. After collecting the data and running one-way ANCOVA, the results revealed that using theater improved the participants' L2 speaking fluency and class engagement. However, there was no significant difference between the performances of the experimental participants and the control participants in terms of self-esteem. Implications of the findings of this study are that L2 teachers can take advantage of theater to make their L2 classrooms more entertaining and effective.

Keywords: class engagement, drama, fluency, self-esteem, theater

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Introduction

Theater and drama, as a whole, are believed to foster all four language skills, namely reading, writing, speaking, and listening by creating an enjoyable and suitable atmosphere for L2 learners. According to Ma and Liu (2022), students in primary and secondary schools can benefit from

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Drama in Education (DIE) to develop language awareness and language abilities. Athiemoolam (2004) believes that most L2 learners lack the confidence to communicate or respond to questions in an L2. According to studies (e.g., Aldavero, 2007; Munther, 2013), using drama in L2 classes has a good impact on L2 learners' class performance and engagement.

According to Nazeryan, Jahandar, and Khodabandelou (2013), learning an L2 is very challenging for most Iranian L2 learners because natural conversations in real life are different from textbook dialogues, and Iranian L2 learners have almost no opportunities to use the L2 outside the classroom in real contexts. Using drama in L2 classrooms makes L2 learning more interesting and effective because "one small action is more powerful than reading hundreds of course books" (Nazeryan et al., 2013, p. 214).

Also, it is worth mentioning that Aldavero (2007) believes that most L2 learners have difficulties producing natural oral communication and that drama has an impact on L2 learners' self-esteem. In the study by Aldavero (2007) on children, he found out that the children had the opportunity for active participation in the construction of meaningful L2 learning, hence their higher confidence in natural spontaneous oral communication. Moreover, as Prihatini (2022) mentions, by using drama to teach English, we, as English teachers, can create good communication skills and make L2 learners more confident to use English.

Zalta (2006) mentions some reasons why we use drama in L2 teaching: Drama is familiar to L2 learners, it helps them build confidence and skills in group dynamics, it is appropriate for their different learning styles, and it allows them to add emotion or personality to a text and to use the L2 in a real context. Regarding the use of theater in L2 classrooms, as Aita (2009) claims, the theater in language learning (TiLL) model increases the motivation of L2 learners, which has been neglected in other L2 learning models.

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Although several studies (e.g., Aita, 2009; Munther, 2013) have been conducted on the impact of drama on L2 learning and it is now evident that drama makes L2 learning fun and keeps L2 learners motivated in L2 learning process, the use of drama has almost been neglected in most L2 learning contexts, especially in Iran. In addition, most prominent studies in this area (e.g., Aldavero, 2007; Zalta, 2006) are about the impact of drama on L2 learning and there are few studies (e.g., Aita, 2009; Patrick, 2008) available on the effect of, exclusively, theater on L2 learning.

It is of paramount importance to shed some light on the difference between drama and theater, as well. Holden (1982) defines drama as practical and educational activities involving the use of language in everyday life, using some amount of imaginary situation (as cited in Moghaddas & Ghafarinia, 2012). Furthermore, he believes that in drama activities, “learners are asked either to portray themselves or to portray someone else in an imaginary situation” (as cited in Khosronejad & Parviz, 2013, p. 87). Also, in defining drama, it is worth mentioning that when drama is used in education, it involves some techniques, namely interactive games, improvisation, role-plays, and frozen image building (Cawthon, Dawson, & Ihorn, 2011; Toivanen, Komulainen, & Ruismäki, 2011).

According to some scholars (e.g., Aita, 2009; Guner & Guner, 2012; Patrick, 2008), theater can be used in L2 classrooms. For instance, according to Aita (2009), TiLL is a technique in which L2 learners are presented with a theater performance done by native speakers. Additionally, Athiemoolam (2004) introduced another term called theater in education (TIE) in which L2 learners produce a theater to be performed to an audience. Thus, we can say that drama is actually an umbrella term for some dramatic activities and techniques among which you can see theater, and that theater involves performing the play to an audience.

L2 speaking fluency is of paramount importance for both L2 teachers and learners because most L2 learners consider themselves successful when they can speak the L2 fluently. In addition, most L2 teachers complain that a large number of L2 learners do not engage in L2 classroom activities. This lack of engagement can be due to the lack of self-esteem among L2 learners. As mentioned above, L2 learners' speaking fluency, engagement, and self-esteem are three important variables in L2 learning. The present study, thus, aimed to investigate the impact of theater on Iranian L2 learners' speaking fluency, engagement, and self-esteem.

Literature Review

Drama, Theater, and EFL Learners' Speaking

Speaking is a very important skill in every L2 class because L2 learners are not considered as people knowing an L2, unless they can communicate in it. Also, according to Aldavero (2007), the problem with most L2 learners is that they are hardly able to produce natural and spontaneous oral communication. As Celik (2019) asserted, "through drama, situations and environments are created for the students to communicate naturally by going out of the classroom. With this feature, drama studies are a practical and convenient tool in speaking classes" (p. 3).

Aldavero (2007) conducted a study on the impact of drama on the development of oral communication. He divided his project into three stages: creative process, rehearsal, and performance. In the creative process stage, the participants were introduced to the story of Thanksgiving and some specific vocabulary items. Then, they were asked to write a script for a play about Thanksgiving. In fact, every group was supposed to write its own scenes and dialogues and make up its own version of the play. In the rehearsal stage, the participants were asked to use improvisation in case they got blocked. After some sessions of rehearsal, they performed the play.

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The results indicated that, through drama techniques, L2 learners learn to use the L2 effectively and creatively. Also, Aldavero (2007) mentions that “drama activities can provide students with an opportunity to use language to express various emotions, to solve problems, to make decisions, and to socialize. ... drama activities are useful in the development of oral communication skills and reading and writing” (p. 43). Aldavero emphasized that drama activities offer opportunities for language learners to express emotions, solve problems, make decisions, and engage socially. These findings align with the broader notion that drama enhances oral communication skills and contributes positively to other language skills, including reading and writing. While Aldavero’s study offers valuable insights, the lack of detailed information about sample size, research design, and potential biases limits its generalizability. Although the use of drama activities showed positive results, it would have been beneficial to address how factors such as participant background and language proficiency might have influenced the outcomes. Additionally, the methodology could be strengthened by comparing the effectiveness of drama-based methods with more traditional teaching approaches in a controlled setting.

Besides, according to Torrico (2015), in drama-integrated L2 classrooms, L2 teaching is something beyond just lists of vocabulary or grammatical rules. He believes that, in such L2 classes, the L2 is taught in a communicative context, which promotes L2 speaking fluency. Torrico (2015) conducted research in order to support the idea that drama activities motivate L2 learners and make them interested in the subject and, as a result, improve their speaking abilities. He believed that in order to improve L2 learners’ speaking abilities, they need to be motivated first.

The participants of the study done by Torrico (2015) were 13 second-year L2 learners of a Spanish high school, with the average age of 18. The participants in the treatment group were taught oral skills through drama activities and those in the control group used traditional methods.

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The L2 teacher used videos, playing cards, real objects, poems, maps, songs, and play scripts to teach oral skills to the treatment group. In the end, the L2 learners acted in front of a video camera, which gave them an opportunity to put their linguistic knowledge into practice. The results revealed that drama helps L2 learners lose their embarrassments and fears. According to Torrico (2015), drama techniques help L2 learners “to develop a contextual and an authentic use of language, as well as critical thinking and creativity” (p. 49).

The results indicated that drama reduced learners' anxiety and helped them develop a more contextual and authentic use of language. According to Torrico, drama also promoted critical thinking and creativity. Although Torrico's study demonstrates the positive impact of drama on motivation and speaking skills, the small sample size and limited context make it difficult to generalize the results. The sample consisted of only 13 learners from one school, so the findings may not be applicable to learners from diverse educational or cultural backgrounds. Additionally, the lack of detailed analysis regarding the participants' prior language skills and the specific criteria for selecting the experimental and control groups raises questions about the study's internal validity. Future research could benefit from larger, more diverse samples to assess the broader applicability of drama-based approaches in various L2 settings.

Nazeryan et al. (2013) did a study on 30 Iranian L2 learners of Simin Language Institute in Guilan. The participants were at the intermediate level, aged 13-17. The L2 was taught through drama activities to the treatment group. The drama activities included, role-plays, games, and simulations. The control group, on the other hand, followed the traditional L2 learning methods. The results revealed that drama had a positive effect on the L2 learners' oral performance in the experimental group.

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This study adds to the growing body of evidence supporting the benefits of drama in language education. However, the study's limited sample size and lack of detailed methodological explanation weaken its generalizability. While the use of drama was shown to be effective, there is little information about how the researchers ensured the groups were comparable at the outset, nor how factors such as learner motivation or engagement might have influenced the results. Future studies should aim to include larger, more representative samples and clarify the methodologies used to enhance the validity of the findings.

In another research study conducted on Iranian L2 learners, Khosronejad and Parviz (2013) selected 60 participants, all intermediate L2 learners of Imam Ali University. The L2 teaching process in the treatment group involved working on some conversations of a series and asking the participants to play the role of the actors in it, which helped them practice L2 speaking without focusing on form. Also, the participants were presented with a prepared drama and were asked to act it out. Finally, they were assigned to prepare a drama according to the topic given to them. In the end, the results indicated that drama had a positive effect on the participants' speaking skill and memory.

The researchers suggested that drama activities helped learners practice speaking without focusing solely on grammatical form. While the study provides valuable insights into the benefits of drama for speaking skills, it could have been enhanced by more rigorous methodological details. For example, the study does not provide information on how participants were selected, whether there were any pretests to measure language proficiency, or how the control group was taught. These omissions make it difficult to assess the robustness of the findings. Moreover, while the results are promising, they could be more compelling if compared with those from other methods of language instruction, such as task-based learning or communicative language teaching.

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Also, Mugiraneza, Habintwali, Kanyambo, and Niyibizi (2024) conducted a study with the population of 1000 students and four teachers in four secondary schools in Kigali City. To determine the sample size, the researchers selected 10% of the student population, which came to 100 students, while all four teachers were included. Interviews were the main research tool, providing opportunities for direct interaction, with responses recorded for accuracy. The study found that both students and teachers recognize the positive impact of drama on improving English-speaking skills. Drama helps students build confidence, expand vocabulary, and enhance fluency by creating an interactive and engaging learning environment. Teachers also highlighted its role in fostering critical thinking and effective communication.

The findings suggest that drama helps create an engaging and interactive learning environment, contributing to improved language outcomes. However, the study's focus on a single city and the reliance on interviews as the main research tool limit the depth of analysis. Interviews provide valuable insights, but they are subjective and may not fully capture the diverse range of experiences across a larger population. Additionally, the study does not provide detailed information on how the sample was selected or whether there were any controls for confounding variables, such as previous drama experience or teacher proficiency. These factors may affect the interpretation and generalization of the results. Future research could use a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative interviews with quantitative measures of language proficiency, to provide a more comprehensive view of the impact of drama on language learning.

Drama, Theater, and EFL Learners' Class Engagement

In every L2 classroom, some L2 learners do not engage in classroom activities for some reason, and this lack of student engagement is a major challenge for every L2 teacher. Many scholars (e.g.,

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Cawthon et al., 2011; Rooney, 2014) believe that the use of drama activities and theater in L2 classrooms has a positive effect on L2 learners' engagement in class activities. According to Celik (2019), one of the most important features of drama is that it is a psychological method based on human beings. This feature eliminates the fears occurring during foreign language teaching, helping shy L2 learners to find an environment where they can express themselves comfortably. Ashton-Hay (2005) asserts that even the shyest L2 learners can benefit from drama when they are taking roles and imagining themselves as someone else. Rooney (2014) believes that "arts-based instructional strategies give teachers a broad range of strategies with which to engage their students" (as cited in Cawthon et al., 2011, p. 4). Besides, arts-based instructional strategies "enhance student learning through increased content knowledge and increased engagement in class activities (Cawthon et al., 2011, p. 4).

Concerning the effect of drama and theater on L2 learners' engagement, the research done by Cawthon et al. (2011) is worth mentioning. Their research was about the effect of drama for school (DFS) on L2 learners' engagement. In this study, student engagement was defined as "active participation in classroom activities as indicated by levels of on-task behavior" (p. 1). This study was conducted in the Victoria Independent School District (VISD). The participants were 19 secondary teachers. After conducting the research and using role-plays, improvisations, and dialogues in their L2 classes, the results showed that "arts-based instruction calls on teachers to be creative participants in their teaching, making the classroom a livelier and engaging place to learn" (p. 19). The study suggested that drama activities can transform the classroom into a space where students are more engaged and motivated to learn. While the study provides useful insights into the role of drama in promoting classroom engagement, it does not offer detailed information about the context of the schools, the teacher training involved, or how student engagement was measured.

Given the subjective nature of measuring engagement, it would be valuable to include both qualitative and quantitative data to assess the impact of drama activities on students' motivation and participation. Additionally, exploring the long-term effects of drama on student engagement could provide more comprehensive insights.

Drama, Theater, and EFL Learners' Self-Esteem

As we all know, most adolescents are likely to smoke, drink, or be violent, and according to Guilford (2001), higher level of self-esteem can protect them and their society against such personal and social issues. He believes that drama can cause positive outcomes regarding learning outcomes and increased self-esteem.

According to Leary and Baumeister (2000), another importance of self-esteem is that the less self-esteem an individual has, the less sociable he or she will be (as cited in Kokx, 2017). Besides, Britner and Pajares (2006) assert that a high level of self-esteem can lead to academic achievement (as cited in Kokx, 2017). According to Jozi Tajareh and Oroji (2017), through drama, L2 learners with low self-confidence will be able to overcome the fear of making mistakes because taking roles functions for them as a safe haven.

According to Rosenberg (1965), self-esteem is “the evaluation which the individual makes and customarily maintains with regard to himself, expressed as an attitude of approval or disapproval” (as cited in Guilford, 2001, p. 2). Another definition mentioned in this study was the definition of high self-esteem proposed by Pope, McHale, and Craighead (1988). According to them, a person is considered to possess a high degree of self-esteem when he or she has a healthy view of self that includes weaknesses but is not critical (as cited in Guilford, 2001).

Guilford (2001) did a study about the effects of drama on adolescents' self-esteem, aged from 12 to 15. The study took 4 months and the participants were some drama students from San Lorenzo Valley Junior High School. In the process of this study, the teacher asked the participants to prepare journals and logging daily entries about their experiments during the production of the theatrical performance. The results showed that the participants' self-esteem had increased through involvement in theater performance.

In addition, Kokx (2017) did a study about the effect of musical theater education on middle school students' self-esteem. The participants were from a private school in Minnesota. They were asked to perform in a kind of theatrical performance involving music, dance, and dialogue. The results showed that the participants who had reported low levels of self-esteem showed an increased self-esteem, flexibility, and openness to change. However, those who had previously reported high levels of self-esteem did not show any such improvement.

While these studies provide compelling evidence of the positive impact of drama on self-esteem, they could benefit from more rigorous methodological designs. For instance, the studies did not always include control groups or pre-tests to measure participants' initial self-esteem levels. This makes it difficult to determine whether the observed changes in self-esteem were truly due to the drama activities or were influenced by other factors. Future research could incorporate control groups and more diverse samples to better assess the causal relationship between drama and self-esteem.

Methodology

Participants

The participants were 60 female intermediate L2 learners from Safir Language Institute of Shahrekord (Iran), whose ages ranged from 14-30. The sample size of 60 participants was selected

based on practical availability at Safir Language Institute, where the female learners outnumbered the male learners significantly. Due to the limited number of the male learners and to avoid potential gender-related variables, only the female participants were included. This approach helped maintain a more homogeneous sample and reduce variability caused by gender differences. The sampling method was based on convenience sampling. The participants were asked to take a placement test in order to ensure homogeneity of the sample. They were divided into two groups: a control group ($n = 30$) and an experimental group ($n = 30$). Also, the experimental group was divided into groups of five. The process was described to the volunteers prior to the treatment and the participants in the experimental group were those who reported an interest or experience in acting and theater.

Materials

In order to gauge the participants' proficiency level, the pen-and-paper version of the Oxford Quick Placement Test (OQPT; 2004) was administered to the participants prior to the treatment. The test consists of 60 multiple-choice items and was taken by all the participants. Although individual differences such as prior language exposure or preferred learning styles were not directly assessed, the use of the OQPT ensured a relatively homogenous level of L2 proficiency among participants. This helped minimize the potential influence of such factors on the outcome of the study.

Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale (RSES; Rosenberg, 1965) was used to measure the global self-esteem of the participants. According to Blascovich and Tomaka (1991), RSES is the most widely used tool for gauging global self-esteem (as cited in Shevlin, Bunting, & Lewis, 1995). On the other hand, Crandall (1973) believed that RSES measures the self-acceptance aspect of self-esteem

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(as cited in Tomas & Oliver, 1999). This questionnaire is a self-report measure containing 10 items scored on a 4-point response format ranging from 1 (*Strongly Disagree*) to 4 (*Strongly Agree*).

Although Mohd Jamil (2006) considered RSES as a reliable (0.8) and valid instrument, he argued that the problem with RSES lies in the fact that it contains both positively and negatively worded items because answering questions versed in reverse-ordered meaning is difficult for most people. Also, according to Robins, Hendin, and Trzesniewski (2001), RSES has “strong convergent validity for both men and women for different ethnic groups and for both college students and community members” (as cited in Mohd Jamil, 2006, p. 9).

Besides, it is worth mentioning that some scholars (e.g., Silber & Tippett, 1965; Fleming & Courtney, 1984) have pointed out that RSES is “internally consistent and temporally stable” (as cited in Shevlin et al., 1995, p. 707). Also, according to Shevlin et al. (1995), the RSES scores are favorably associated with the scores on other scales of self-esteem like the Learner Self-Esteem Scale (Savin-Williams & Jaquish, 1981) and the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory (Demo, 1985).

Also, Student Course Engagement Questionnaire (SCEQ; Handelsman, Briggs, Sullivan, & Towler, 2005) was used in order to gauge the participants’ engagement in class activities. This measure of student engagement was developed by Handelsman et al. (2005), using standard psychometric procedures for scale development (Hinkin, 1998). After developing the measure, they verified its reliability and validity by piloting it on a group of participants. As a result, the obtained evidence for the reliability of the measure showed that its reliability is above the recommended level (.76 to .82). Besides, concerning the validity of the measure, Handelsman et al. (2005) asserted that:

We found evidence of four interpretable and internally consistent factors: skills, emotional, participation/interaction, and performance. Apart from the correlation between emotional and skills engagement, the correlations among the student engagement variables were moderately low, suggesting initial evidence for the discriminant validity of the measure. We also obtained evidence of convergent and discriminant validity of the SCEQ by relating SCEQ scores with related constructs associated with student learning and motivation. (p. 189)

In order to determine the participants' L2 speaking fluency, before any treatment, they were given a speaking test designed by Sheikhipour (2019). This test proved to be valid by two experts and its reliability was calculated as .72. According to Sheikhipour, the items on the pretest resemble the ones in IELTS speaking tasks. The pretest included two questions asking the participants to describe a specific event in their lives. The participants' performances were audio-recorded to be scored and analyzed later.

In order to determine the effect of theater performance on the participants' L2 speaking fluency, a posttest was administered to them. Like the pretest, the posttest was designed by Sheikhipour (2019). The reliability of the posttest was estimated to be .85 and it was determined to be valid by two experts in the field. According to Sheikhipour, the posttest was like IELTS speaking tasks, as well.

In order to measure the participants' L2 speaking fluency, after converting the speeches into texts, they were pruned by extracting self-corrected words, repetitions, pauses of more than 3 s, and asides in L1 (Lennon, 1990, as cited in Ortega, 1999). Then, we divided the total number of articulated syllables by total articulation time (Griffiths, 1991, as cited in Ortega, 1999).

Procedure

After getting permission from the director of Safir Language Institute of Shahrekord (Iran), one of the researchers asked the volunteers to take the OQPT. Out of 68 L2 learners who took the OQPT, 60 participants were selected to take part in the study.

In order to determine the level of self-esteem, engagement in class activities, and L2 speaking fluency, two questionnaires and a pretest of speaking were given to each participant prior to the treatment. The questionnaires were filled out by the participants at home. The pretest of speaking, on the other hand, was given to the participants individually in a quiet room and their responses were recorded on a smartphone. Later, the data collected during the pretest speaking test session were transcribed and analyzed.

Then, the participants were divided into two groups: a control group and an experimental group. The participants in the experimental group were those who were interested in acting and theater.

In the present study, the focus was on improving the L2 learners' speaking fluency, self-esteem, and class engagement through the process of developing a theater performance. To implement the treatment, each session for the experimental group included brief introductory activities, guided group rehearsals of selected scenes, character analysis discussions, and peer feedback. These activities aimed to promote natural use of language, increase self-confidence, and foster classroom engagement. A scenario called *Anna Alone* was chosen for this study. The experimental group was divided into groups of five because there were five characters in the scenario. In the first session, the L2 learners watched a video of native speakers performing the same scenario. Then, they were asked to talk about their favorite characters. In the following sessions, every group practiced a scene for 1 hr and the others watched. Each session took 4 hr

because there were four groups in the experimental group. On the other hand, the participants in the control group went on with their traditional English classes in the institute. After the treatment, two questionnaires and a posttest of speaking was given to the participants in order to see if they had improved during the treatment or not.

Data Analysis

The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS, version 25) was used to analyze the collected data. One-way ANCOVA was run to analyze the data in order to determine the effect of theater on the participants' self-esteem, engagement in class activities, and L2 speaking fluency. In this study, One-way ANCOVA was used to examine the effect of theater on self-esteem, engagement in class activities, and L2 speaking fluency. Since these outcomes could be influenced by covariates (e.g., baseline self-esteem, motivation), ANCOVA allows for controlling these variables to isolate the true effect of theater. This method helps compare group means while accounting for the influence of confounding factors, ensuring a more accurate analysis.

Results

Effects of Using Theater on EFL Learners' Speaking Fluency

The first research question of the study was formulated to investigate whether using theater in L2 classrooms had any significant effects on the L2 learners' speaking fluency or not. To answer this research question, the researchers had to compare the speaking fluency posttest scores of the participants in the experimental group with the speaking posttest scores of those in the control group, for which an independent samples t test could be used. However, to control for any possible differences between the experimental and control groups prior to the treatment, a one-way

ANCOVA was conducted. This way, the researchers could control for any possible differences between the two groups on the pretest and, then, compare their posttest scores. Before conducting the on-way ANCOVA, the assumptions underlying this statistical test, including the assumptions of normality, linearity, and homogeneity of regression slopes, were checked. Kolmogorov-Smirnov test of normality yielded nonsignificant values for the speaking fluency pretest and posttest scores of the participants in the experimental and control groups, suggesting the normality of these distributions. Also, the scatterplots drawn in SPSS indicated that the assumption of linearity was met for this analysis. Moreover, the nonsignificant p-value of .80 showed that the regression slopes were homogeneous. Hence, we could proceed with the results of the one-way ANCOVA (see Table 1):

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics for Speaking Fluency Posttest Scores of Experimental & Control Groups

Groups	Observed Mean	Adjusted Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Experimental Group	2.228	2.103	.783	30
Control Group	1.993	1.897	.601	30
Total	2.000	2.000	.692	60

Such descriptive statistics as observed mean, adjusted mean, and standard deviation are shown for both experimental and control groups in Table 1. The adjusted value for the speaking fluency posttest of the experimental group ($M = 2.103$) was greater than that of the control group ($M = 1.897$). To determine whether this difference was a statistically significant one or not, the researchers needed to look down the Sig. column in the ANCOVA table (see Table 2):

Table 2

One-Way ANCOVA for Speaking Fluency Posttest Scores of Experimental & Control Groups

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Adjusted Means	0.59	1	0.59	7.86	0.00
Adjusted Error	4.26	57	0.07		
Total	4.85	58	.692		

In Table 2, the p-value under the Sig. column is the most important piece of information. This p-value should be compared with the .05 significance level. Here, the p-value was smaller than the specified level of significance ($.00 < .05$), indicating that there was a statistically significant difference between the speaking fluency posttest scores of the experimental and control groups. In other words, the treatment (i.e., using theater in the L2 classroom) significantly affected the speaking fluency of the experimental group participants, as they enjoyed a significantly higher speaking fluency mean score on the posttest compared to their counterparts in the control group.

The obtained results are graphically represented in Figure 1:

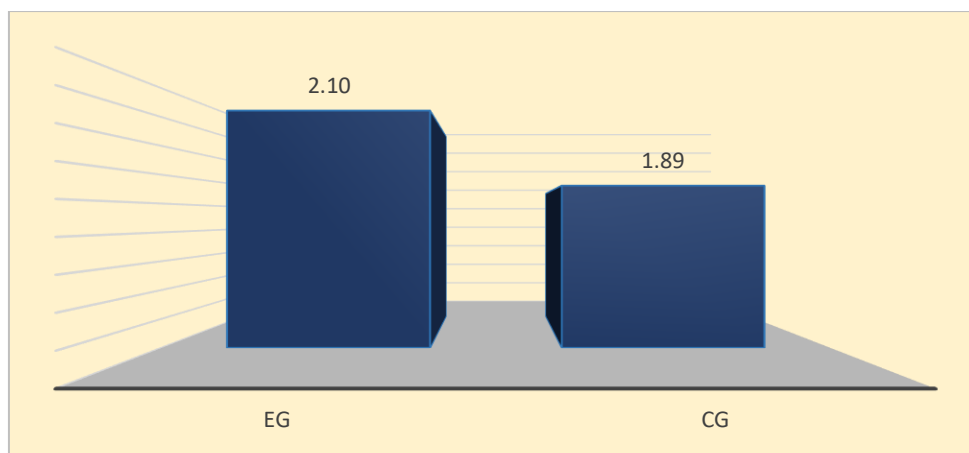


Fig. 1

Speaking Fluency Posttest Mean Scores of Experimental & Control Groups

As seen in Figure 1, the experimental group participants significantly outperformed those in the control group on the speaking fluency posttest, leading us to the rejection of the first null hypothesis of the study. H01: The use of theater in L2 classrooms has no significant effect on L2 learners' speaking fluency.

Effects of Using Theater on EFL Learners' Class Engagement

The second research question of the study addressed the effects of using theater in L2 classrooms on L2 learners' engagement in classroom activities. The exact same statistical procedure adopted above was used again to compare the engagement scores (which were obtained from the responses to an engagement questionnaire prior to and after the implementation of the intervention) of the participants in the two groups. Differently put, to statistically control for any possible pre-existing differences between the experimental and control groups and to compare their engagement posttest scores, a one-way ANCOVA was conducted. For this analysis, the assumptions of normality, linearity, and homogeneity of regression slopes were checked and the absence of any violations of these assumptions was ensured. The results of the descriptive statistics comparing the mean scores of the experimental and control groups with respect to their engagement scores are presented in Table 3:

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics for Engagement Posttest Scores of Experimental & Control Groups

Groups	Observed Mean	Adjusted Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Experimental Group	87.80	87.02	13.69	30
Control Group	74.86	75.64	11.75	30
Total	81.33	81.33	12.72	60

Table 3 shows the descriptive statistics of the engagement posttest scores for the experimental and control groups. The adjusted engagement posttest mean score of the

experimental group participants ($M = 87.02$) was larger than the adjusted engagement posttest mean score of the control group participants ($M = 75.64$). To find out whether this difference in the engagement posttest scores of the experimental and control groups was a significant one or not, the researchers needed to look down the Sig. column in Table 4:

Table 4

One-Way ANCOVA for Engagement Posttest Scores of Experimental & Control Groups

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Adjusted Means	1934.77	1	1934.77	28.13	0.00
Adjusted Error	3920.53	57	68.78		
Total	5855.30	58			

In Table 4.4, under the Sig. column, the p-value is smaller than the specified level of significance ($.00 < .05$), indicating that the treatment (i.e., using theater) was effective in enhancing the L2 participants' classroom engagement because there was a significant difference between the engagement posttest scores of the experimental and control groups in favor of the former. Figure 2 also shows the superiority of the young experimental group participants to the control group participants on the L2 classroom engagement posttest:

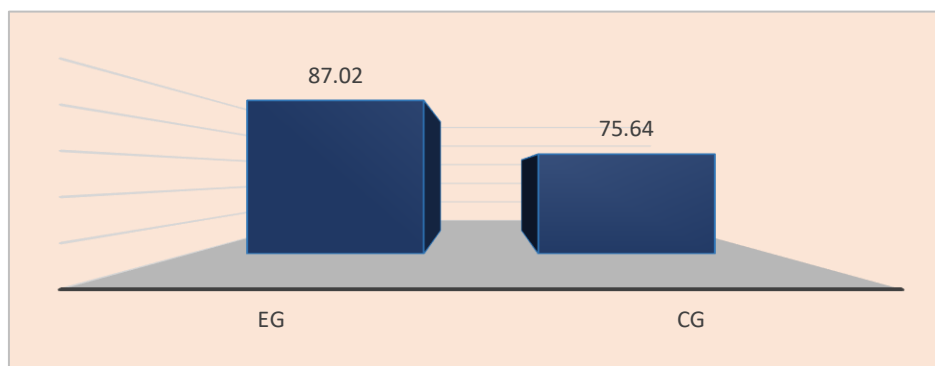


Fig.2

Engagement posttest mean scores of experimental & control groups

That experimental group participants had a significantly higher engagement score on the posttest vis-à-vis the control group participants is obviously shown in Figure 2. This boils down to the rejection of the second null hypothesis of the study and to the conclusion that using theater, in fact, leads to the enhancement of L2 learners' engagement in L2 classroom activities:

H2: The use of theater in L2 classrooms has a significant effect on L2 learners' engagement in L2 classroom activities.

Effects of Using Theater on EFL Learners' Self-Esteem

The final research question of the current study sought to examine whether using theater led to significant improvements of self-esteem on the part of the L2 participants exposed to it. To find an answer to this research question, the participants' self-esteem scores (obtained from their self-esteem questionnaire handed out to them before and after the intervention) in the experimental and control groups had to be compared. As these two groups might have had pre-existing differences in terms of their levels of self-esteem before the treatment commenced, as could have been the case for the first two research questions, a one-way ANCOVA was conducted to help find an answer to this research question. Prior to that, the assumptions of normality, linearity, and homogeneity of regression slopes were checked and it was ensured that there was no violation of these assumptions (see Table 5):

Table 5

Descriptive Statistics for Self-Esteem Posttest Scores of Experimental & Control Groups

Groups	Observed Mean	Adjusted Mean	Std. Deviation	<i>N</i>
Experimental Group	23.06	22.95	4.85	30
Control Group	21.46	21.58	3.44	30
Total	22.26	22.26	4.14	60

The adjusted mean score for the experimental group participants on the self-esteem posttest was larger than the mean score of the control group participants ($22.95 > 21.58$). As mentioned above, to control for their pre-existing differences for the adjusted self-esteem posttest mean scores and to find out the (non)significance of the difference on the posttest, the p-value in the ANCOVA table had to be consulted (see Table 6):

Table 6

One-Way ANCOVA for Self-Esteem Posttest Scores of Experimental & Control Groups

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	<i>df</i>	Mean Square	<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Adjusted Means	28.25	1	28.25	3.56	.06
Adjusted Error	451.85	57	7.93		
Total	480.10	58			

In Table 6, under the *Sig.* column, it can be observed that the p-value is larger than the specified level of significance ($.06 > .05$), indicating that the difference between the self-esteem posttest scores of the participants in the two groups did not reach statistical significance. In other words, the treatment (using theater) failed to bring about significant changes in the levels of self-esteem of the experimental group participants. Figure 3 depicts the approximate equality of the self-esteem posttest mean scores of the experimental and control groups:

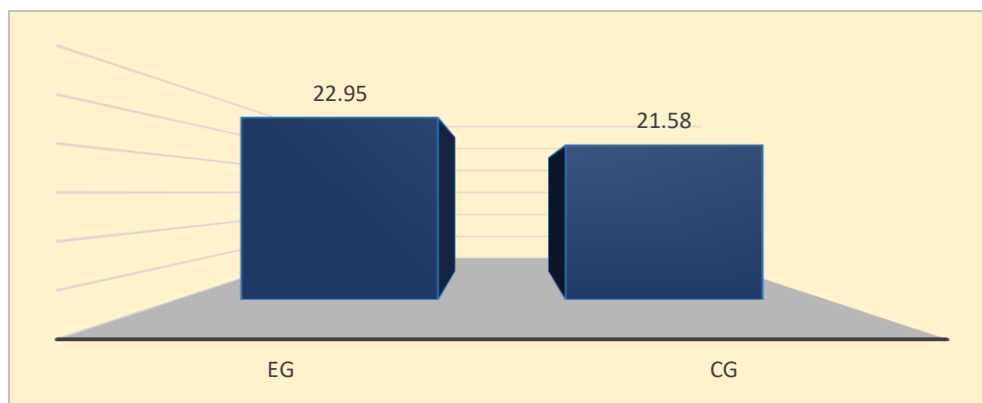


Fig. 3

Self-Esteem posttest mean scores of experimental and control groups

It is clearly observed in Figure 3 that the experimental group participants could obtain a better (though not significantly) mean score than the control group on the posttest of self-esteem and the difference between the two was not statistically significant. This result means that we failed to reject the third null hypothesis, as using theater could not exert significant changes in the self-esteem of the L2 participants who underwent this type of treatment:

H03: The use of theater in L2 classrooms has no significant effect on L2 learners' self-esteem.

Discussion

Using drama and theater is believed to have good effects on L2 learning. For example, Aldavero (2007) believes that drama can affect L2 learners' class performance and engagement. In addition, Athiemoolam (2004) asserts that drama can affect L2 learners' confidence to communicate or respond to questions in an L2.

To further explain the divergence from previous studies, one potential reason for the lack of significant improvement in self-esteem in this study may be the differences in the implementation of theater techniques. Previous studies like those by Guilford (2001) and Kokx (2017) focused on broader drama and performance contexts, whereas the current study specifically explored theater techniques in the L2 classroom. Additionally, the participants' baseline levels of self-esteem may differ across studies, which could influence the observed results. In this study, participants may have had a higher baseline level of self-esteem, leading to less noticeable improvements in this area.

Most scholars (e.g., Aldavero, 2007; Cawthon et al., 2011) have worked on the effect of drama on L2 learning process and little attention has been paid to the role of theater in L2 classes. In addition, the number of studies done on the effect of drama and theater on Iranian

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L2 learners is few and far between. A review of previous studies highlights the methodological differences between those studies and the current research. For example, Aldavero (2007) primarily examined the effect of drama on L2 learners' engagement, but the implementation and definition of drama techniques were not always clearly defined. This ambiguity may contribute to varying outcomes across studies. Furthermore, Cawthon et al. (2011) focused on engagement but had a small sample size, which limits the generalizability of their findings. The current study addressed some of these limitations by using a larger sample size and a more structured theater intervention, which may explain the differences in results, particularly regarding self-esteem.

Inspired by previous works in this regard (e.g., Aldavero, 2007; Cawthon et al., 2011), the present study was an attempt to find empirical evidence of the (possible) effectiveness of theater on Iranian L2 learners' speaking fluency, class engagement, and self-esteem. The findings of the studies done before (e.g., Aldavero, 2007; Cawthon et al., 2011; Guilford, 2001) indicated that drama and theater can improve L2 learners' L2 speaking fluency, classroom engagement, and self-esteem.

Speaking is of paramount importance in L2 classrooms because most L2 learners do not consider themselves successful in the L2 learning process unless they are good at speaking. For this reason, a number of studies (e.g., Aldavero, 2007; Torrico, 2015) have been carried out on the effects of drama and theater on L2 speaking fluency. The importance of speaking fluency in L2 classrooms is well documented. However, it is crucial to consider the differences in the cultural and educational backgrounds of participants in this study compared to those in other studies. While Torrico (2015) and Aldavero (2007) found significant improvements in speaking fluency, the findings of this study suggest that theater techniques alone may not

always lead to enhanced self-esteem, possibly due to the specific classroom environment or the participants' initial self-esteem levels. This highlights the need for further research to explore the complex relationship between theater and self-esteem in L2 classrooms.

Based on the findings of previous studies carried out in this regard (e.g., Aldavero, 2007; Torrico, 2015), it was expected that using theater can improve L2 speaking fluency. The results of the present study pointed towards the idea that using theater in L2 classrooms affected the experimental group participants' L2 speaking fluency because their speaking fluency mean score on the posttest was higher than that of the control group.

In this study, the results of the first experiment did show a considerable relationship between using theater and the participants' L2 speaking fluency. In other words, on a statistical level, the experimental group participants outperformed the control group participants in speaking task. So, it can be said that the first null hypothesis was rejected and that the findings are compatible with previous studies done in this regard (e.g., Aldavero, 2007; Torrico, 2015). So, we go for the following directional hypothesis:

H04: The use of theater in L2 classrooms has a significant effect on L2 learners' speaking fluency.

The results of the present study are compatible with the findings of the study carried out by Aldavero (2007), which showed that using drama techniques in L2 classrooms can help L2 learners improve their oral communication skills and use the L2 effectively and creatively by providing an opportunity to use the L2. However, while the findings on speaking fluency align with previous studies, the results regarding self-esteem diverged from those reported by Guilford (2001) and Kokx (2017). Both of these studies showed improvements in self-esteem following drama participation, but the current study did not find a significant relationship

between theater and self-esteem. This discrepancy may be due to differences in participant characteristics, as the studies by Guilford and Kokx involved participants with lower initial self-esteem, who may have been more susceptible to the positive effects of drama.

In addition, the results of the study done on 13 participants by Torrico (2015) indicated that using drama techniques in L2 classrooms can help L2 learners overcome their fears and use the L2 authentically. The results of the current study are compatible with Torrico's study in the sense that by getting over their fears, L2 learners can speak in the L2 more fluently. In addition to improving engagement, using theater in L2 classrooms can also enhance L2 learners' willingness to participate in speaking activities, leading to better fluency.

Two other studies mentioned before were done on Iranian L2 learners. The results of the studies carried out by Nazeryan et al. (2013) and Khosronejad and Parviz (2013) indicated that using drama in L2 classrooms can foster L2 learners' speaking skill, as it was shown by the findings of the present study, too. It should be noted, however, that the number of studies concerning the effect of theater on Iranian L2 learners is very limited.

One of the problems that every L2 teacher may face in his or her L2 classroom is that some L2 learners do not get engaged in classroom activities for some reasons. Because getting engaged in classroom activities does help L2 learners in L2 learning process, there are lots of studies (e.g., Ashton-Hay, 2005; Cawthon et al., 2011; Rooney, 2014) considering this subject. Based on the study done by Cawthon et al. (2011), considering the effect of theater on classroom engagement of 19 participants, it was expected that theater could have good effects on classroom engagement. Furthermore, while not all studies have shown a significant relationship between theater and self-esteem, other factors such as the type of drama used and the teacher's approach might influence these results.

Similar to the first experiment of this study, the results of the second experiment revealed a significant relationship between using theater on L2 engagement in classroom activities. In other words, using theater did enhance the L2 participants' classroom engagement, as it was expected because the experimental group participants outperformed the control group participants on the classroom engagement posttest. Thus, it is worth mentioning that the second null hypothesis was rejected, as well, and that the findings of the second research question are compatible with the studies done before (e.g., Cawthon et al., 2011). Therefore, we go for the following directional hypothesis:

H05: The use of theater in L2 classrooms has a significant effect on L2 learners' engagement in L2 classroom activities.

It is also important to consider the social dynamics within the classroom, as group activities in theater often foster stronger bonds among students, which can indirectly affect both engagement and self-esteem.

The study done by Cawthon et al. (2011) is worth mentioning because, as its findings indicated, using drama techniques in L2 classrooms can bring about an engaging atmosphere for L2 learners. As it is obvious, concerning the effects of using drama techniques in L2 classrooms on classroom engagement, the results of the present study are compatible with the study carried out by Cawthon et al. (2011).

Conclusion

Having a high level of self-esteem helps people be successful not only in their L2 classrooms, but also in their personal lives. Based on studies carried out in this regard (e.g., Guilford, 2001; Kokx, 2017), it was expected that theater can improve the participants' self-

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esteem. But, unlike the first two research questions, the findings of the third one did not show any significant relationship between using theater in L2 classrooms and the L2 participants' self-esteem, and so we failed to reject the third null hypothesis.

The findings of the study done by Guilford (2001) showed that involvement in theater performance could lead to an increased self-esteem. Also, Kokx (2017), whose study was about the effect of musical theater on some participants, claimed that performing a kind of theatrical performance involving music, dance, and dialogue increased the self-esteem of the students who had reported a low level of self-esteem on the pretest. However, the findings of the present study are not compatible with the abovementioned studies.

It is worth mentioning that although the posttest mean score of the experimental group participants was better than that of the control group participants, the difference between the two groups was not statistically significant. So, the third hypothesis was not rejected, so it should be noted that using theater did not have a significant effect on the L2 participants' self-esteem in the present study. As mentioned before, some scholars (e.g., Guilford, 2001; Kokx, 2017) believe that using drama and theater in L2 classrooms can lead to the enhancement of L2 learners' self-esteem, which is not supported by the findings of the present study.

According to the findings of the statistical analyses of the current study, two of the three null hypotheses of the present study were rejected, and the researchers failed to reject the third null hypothesis. In other words, there was a significant relationship between the independent variable (i.e., using theater in L2 classrooms) and two dependent variables (i.e., speaking fluency and classroom engagement). But regarding the third dependent variable, although the experimental group participants' performance on the self-esteem posttest was better than that of control group participants, no significant relationship was found between using theater and

self-esteem because the difference between the two groups mean score was not statistically significant.

Drama and theater are believed to foster all four language skills. So, if an L2 teacher is thinking of a way to improve his or her L2 learners' performance, a drama- integrated L2 classroom is a good idea. According to Torrico (2015), drama and theater make the L2 classroom atmosphere fun and engaging, which makes L2 learners overcome their embarrassments and fears and start speaking in the L2 more fluently.

One of the challenges that every L2 teacher may face in his or her L2 classrooms is that some L2 learners do not get engaged in the L2 classroom activities, maybe because they are unwilling or too shy to do so or maybe because they are afraid of making mistakes. Ashton-Hay (2005) claims that by using drama and theater in L2 classrooms, L2 learners are imagining themselves as someone else and it makes them less embarrassed about getting engaged in L2 classroom activities or making mistakes.

In addition, according to Guilford (2001), low level of self-esteem may cause various problems in early adulthood and, although the findings of the present study do not support this idea, he believes that bringing drama into L2 classrooms can help L2 learners improve their level of self-esteem and overcome such problems. Also, having a higher level of self-esteem, L2 learners are engaged more in classroom activities and improve their language skills by doing so.

Learning an L2 through acting and theater is widely welcomed among L2 learners because they mostly think of it as a fun and new experience, and that is why theater can affect various aspects of L2 learning by making the L2 classroom atmosphere fun. Thus, as it was mentioned above, L2 teachers can help L2 learners improve their language skills and be more successful

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not only in L2 classrooms, but also in their personal lives by bringing drama and theater into their L2 classrooms.

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Appendix A

First Speaking Assessment Task

Part 1:

Describe your plans for next year.

You should say:

What is it?

When you want to do it?

How you want to achieve it?

Part 2:

Describe one of your childhood memories.

What is it?

When it happened?

How did it affect you in life?

Appendix B

Second Speaking Assessment Task

Part 1:

Describe what you want to do in the future.

You should say:

What is it?

When you want to do it?

How do you want to achieve it?

Part 2:

Describe a journey you went on.

You should say:

Where did you go on your journey?

Why did you get to this particular place?

What did you do and with whom?