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ACTING OUT EMOTIONS: DRAMA TECHNIQUES FOR TEACHING ENGLISH AND NURTURING STUDENTS' EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

This article presents a qualitative study of the specifics of implementing drama techniques for teaching English and developing students' emotional intelligence. It analyzes the impact of stress on students' emotional regulation, concentration, and overall well-being. The focus is on the necessity to develop students' emotional intelligence simultaneously with the formation of their communicative competence. According to the results of the study conducted at Zhytomyr Ivan Franko State University and Kryvyi Rih State Pedagogical University, it has been proved that the implementation of drama techniques such as Dubbing, Acting Out Movie/Book Scenes, Conscience Alley, Hot Seating, Tableaux, and others has a positive effect on the formation of students' communicative competence and the development of their emotional intelligence.

Key words: drama techniques, student, emotional intelligence, the English language, speech skills development.

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ПРОГРАВАЮЧИ ЕМОЦІЇ: ДРАМАТИЧНІ ТЕХНІКИ ДЛЯ НАВЧАННЯ АНГЛІЙСЬКОЇ МОВИ ТА РОЗВИТКУ ЕМОЦІЙНОГО ІНТЕЛЕКТУ СТУДЕНТІВ

У статті представлено якісне дослідження особливостей імплементації драматичних технік для навчання англійської мови та розвитку емоційного інтелекту здобувачів вищої освіти; проаналізовано вплив стресу на емоційну регуляцію, концентрацію та загальне благополуччя студентів; сфокусовано увагу на необхідності розвитку емоційного інтелекту здобувачів освіти одночасно з формуванням їхньої комунікативної компетентності. За результатами дослідження, що було проведено на базі Житомирського державного університету імені Івана Франка та Криворізького державного педагогічного університету, доведено, що імплементація драматичних технік, як-от Dubbing, Acting Out Movie/Book Scenes, Conscience Alley, Hot Seating, Tableaux та інших, позитивно впливає на формування

комунікативної компетентності здобувачів вищої освіти та на розвиток їхнього емоційного інтелекту.

Ключові слова: драматичні техніки, студенти, емоційний інтелект, англійська мова, розвиток мовленнєвих вмінь.

In recent years, students have faced unprecedented challenges, significantly affecting their emotional and social well-being. The COVID-19 pandemic (2019–2022) led to a shift in learning dynamics, moving education to remote and virtual spaces and hindering essential social interaction and emotional support. The ongoing conflict in Ukraine (2022–2025) has further added emotional burdens, with students grappling with trauma, instability, and uncertainty. These events have led to disruptions in students' academic and social engagement, further highlighting the need for trauma-informed teaching practices and the integration of social-emotional learning (SEL) to help students navigate these challenges.

The present context in Ukraine, amidst its recovery and cultural renewal, underscores the importance of integrating SEL in educational practices to foster resilience and emotional healing, addressing the aftermath of trauma, and providing the necessary emotional support for students.

For many students, recent global and local events have resulted in trauma, which can manifest as heightened anxiety, difficulty concentrating, and emotional dysregulation. This emotional challenge often impacts their learning and social interactions. Therefore, recognizing trauma and implementing methods to address it in educational settings is critical. Trauma-informed strategies help students feel understood and supported, allowing them to heal and re-engage in their learning process.

Stress, particularly that stemming from trauma, can significantly affect students' emotional regulation, concentration, and overall well-being. *Common signs of stress* in students include: a lack of interest and motivation in schoolwork, frequent absenteeism, emotional outbursts, and physical complaints such as headaches

or stomach aches. These stressors often lead to disengagement from the learning environment. Students who are under stress may have trouble concentrating, not attend class regularly, struggle to regulate their emotions, fight, argue, exhibit “bad habits” such as biting their nails, experiencing hiccups or falling asleep at their desk, and have less patience than you would expect [6]. As a result, educators must be able to identify these symptoms and offer appropriate strategies and support to help students manage stress and foster emotional resilience.

As students transition from trauma to emotional healing, it becomes essential for educators to integrate techniques that help students articulate and process their emotions. Incorporating Drama-Based Pedagogy (DBP) into an EFL classroom, in our opinion, can become a great solution as it uses active and dramatic approaches to engage students in academic, affective, and aesthetic learning through dialogic meaning-making in all areas of the curriculum [2]. Drama provides a space where students can externalize their feelings in a safe environment, allowing them to explore their emotions without fear of judgment. Drama makes language learning an active, creative, motivating, and engaging experience, nurturing collaboration and teamwork, bringing the real world into the classroom, and definitely helping learners gain confidence and self-esteem needed to use the language spontaneously, developing their emotional awareness and self-regulation, and consequently lowering stress and trauma [5].

Using drama in this context helps students navigate their emotional states and fosters a sense of agency in dealing with personal challenges. Drama is highly related to human interaction. It consists of all communication processes [7]. Besides, drama provides a rich experience that engages the body, emotions, and senses in dynamic learning. By acting out the material, students who have difficulty with

reading and writing can avoid struggling with pen and paper, and may expose a previously unnoticed intelligence or ability [1, pp. 2–3].

Hence, drama offers multiple benefits for SEL by providing students with opportunities to practice emotional regulation, empathy, and collaborative problem-solving. By stepping into different roles and perspectives, students gain insight into their own emotional states and those of others. In addition to enhancing emotional awareness, drama also fosters teamwork and social skills. Through group work and shared performance, students build communication skills and learn to support one another in a collaborative process. This approach to SEL offers a holistic way to address the emotional and social needs of students, especially in challenging times.

In terms of **communicative competence development**, drama assists in students' skills advancement in:

- phonological competence (pronunciation, intonation, ways to emphasize);
- speaking interaction and production;
- different modes of reading (intensive, extensive, scanning, and skimming);
- writing skills (taking notes, extending and shortening lines, writing and adapting a script);
- learners' vocabulary;
- accuracy and fluency;
- socio-cultural competence;
- organization skills (planning, time management, processing, performing);
- decision-making and problem-solving skills;
- cognitive, critical, and creative thinking skills;
- memorization skills.

Methodology: The classroom-based inquiry employed a mixed-methods approach to evaluate the effectiveness of drama-based techniques in fostering social and emotional learning (SEL) during the 2023–2025 academic years. The study involved second-year EFL students at two Ukrainian institutions: Zhytomyr Ivan Franko State University, where students attended in-person classes and were able to practise various drama strategies in a physical

setting, and Kryvyj Rih State Pedagogical University, where instruction was delivered online and students were engaged with the same techniques both synchronously and asynchronously. A combination of quantitative data analysis, such as surveys and pre- and post-assessments, alongside qualitative data from classroom observations, was used to gauge the impact of drama activities on students' emotional expression, social interaction, and empathy.

The participants were involved in various drama-based activities, such as tableaux (visualizing emotions), role-playing, simulations, dubbing, and dramatizing scenes from textbooks, aimed at encouraging emotional exploration, role-taking, and collaborative problem-solving. The data was collected in two stages:

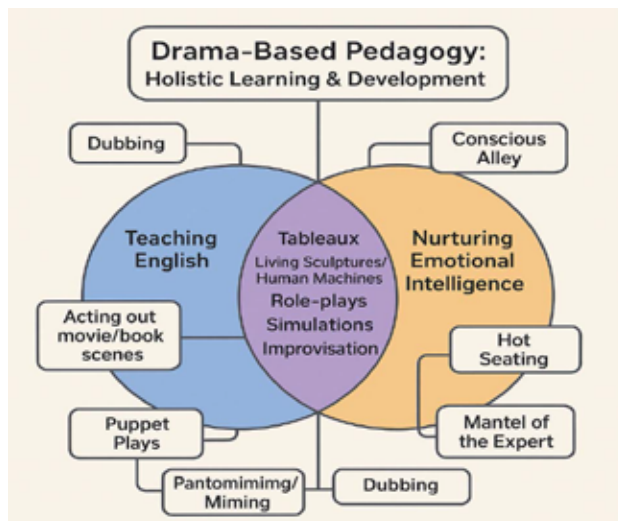
1. Pre-assessment: Students completed a survey that assessed their emotional awareness, stress levels, and social skills prior to engaging in drama activities.

2. Post-assessment: After a series of EFL sessions with the wide incorporation of described drama techniques, students were surveyed again to measure changes in their emotional expression, social interactions, and empathy towards others.

The following drama techniques were practised with the students. Initially, they can be divided into three groups:

1. *Techniques primarily emphasizing teaching English but also with EI benefits.*

Dubbing, which involves students replacing original character voices in film or cartoon scenes with their own spoken interpretations, is a dynamic drama-based strategy with substantial pedagogical value in the EFL classroom. From a linguistic perspective, dubbing enhances pronunciation, stress, intonation, and fluency, as learners must listen attentively to authentic speech and reproduce it accurately in context. It also supports vocabulary acquisition and grammatical accuracy, as students become more aware of language use in real-life communicative situations. Beyond language development, dubbing significantly contributes to the cultivation of



Pic. 1. Drama Techniques for Holistic Learning and Development

emotional intelligence. By stepping into the roles of animated or live-action characters, students practice recognizing, expressing, and managing emotions –both their own and others’. This process nurtures empathy, active listening, self-awareness, and emotional regulation. Students must interpret non-verbal cues such as tone of voice, facial expressions, and gestures, which are key elements of social-emotional competence. In this way, dubbing becomes not only a tool for enhancing oral communication but also a powerful medium for promoting emotional literacy and intercultural sensitivity in language learners.

Acting out movie/book scenes from familiar/popular films or literature is an effective strategy for enhancing both English language skills and emotional intelligence. From a language learning standpoint, such dramatization enhances fluency through meaningful repetition, encourages the use of vocabulary in authentic contexts, and deepens students’ comprehension of narrative structures. By memorizing and performing scripted dialogues, students naturally internalize grammar patterns and improve their pronunciation, stress, and intonation. At the same time, embodying characters helps students develop empathy, understand their

emotions, attitudes, and motivations, and reflect on social interactions.

2. *Techniques Primarily Emphasizing Nurturing Emotional Intelligence but with English benefits.*

Conscience Alley, sometimes known as Decision Alley or Thought Tunnel [3], turned out to be a useful technique for exploring any kind of dilemma faced by a character, decision-making, understanding different perspectives, empathy, and providing an opportunity to analyse a decisive moment in greater detail. The class forms two lines facing each other. One person (the teacher or a participant) walks between the lines as each member of the group speaks their advice. It can be organised so that those on one side give opposing advice to those on the other. When the character reaches the end of the alley, they make their decision [7].

Hot seating, which involves placing a student in the role of a character who must answer spontaneous questions posed by fellow students, has proved effective in enhancing both linguistic abilities and emotional intelligence. When students respond in character, they participate in authentic conversational exchanges, which strengthens their fluency, spoken accuracy, and interpersonal communication. The

improvisational nature of the activity encourages quick thinking, logical structuring of ideas, and coherent sequencing – all of which contribute to deeper cognitive and linguistic development while reinforcing grammar and vocabulary in context. Additionally, taking on a character role helps students explore emotional states, motivations, and social interactions, thereby cultivating empathy and emotional understanding. Simultaneously, those asking and listening to the questions improve their own communication, active listening, and critical thinking skills – essential elements of SEL.

Mantel of the Expert (MoE) is based on the premise that treating students as responsible experts increases their engagement and confidence. They can perceive a real purpose for learning and discovering together provides them with skills and knowledge they can apply to their everyday lives [4]. MoE encourages taking on responsibility, problem-solving, empathy for a “client”, creativity, and improves teamwork, communication skills, critical thought, and decision-making. It advances student public speaking and representation skills, explaining, reporting, and negotiating.

3. *Tools strongly contributing to both teaching English and nurturing emotional intelligence.*

Role-plays, which are the basis of all dramatic activity, allow students to create their own dialogues using their active language and incorporating newly learned vocabulary and structures. By adopting a role, children can step into the past or future and travel to any location, dealing with issues on moral and intellectual levels. Thus, role play can be easily utilised to illuminate themes across the curriculum [7]. Role-plays positively affect students’ English communicative competence development in terms of fluency, vocabulary, pragmatic language, turn-taking, as well as their emotional intelligence, especially perspective-taking, empathy, conflict resolution, and social skills practice.

Simulations, which are made-up problems, cases, or situations using real-life constraints. Apart from using the real language, terms

and communicative patterns, students get extremely excited and are willing to play and learn at the same time, practising in using specific vocabulary, negotiation, problem-solving discourse, as well as collaboration, decision-making under pressure, empathy for a situation.

Improvisation, as another drama technique, is the scene set by the educator and performed by the students with little or no time to prepare a script. The more frequently you use it, the more fluent your students become. It fosters students’ spontaneous speech, quick thinking, and creative language use. In terms of emotional intelligence, it develops their adaptability, active listening, teamwork, self-confidence, and emotional expression.

Puppet Plays/Talks are quite useful for students with a high level of inhibition or anxiety. Usually, students who don’t want to talk about themselves feel more relaxed and comfortable doing or saying things for the puppets. And, on the contrary, active and motivated students are also eager to act as funny or fairy-tale characters. Puppet talks are advised for dialogue practice, storytelling, character voices, expressing emotions safely (through puppets), social interaction, and creativity.

Tableaux is one of the drama techniques, in which students are presented with a problem/situation that evokes some emotions. The procedure is straightforward. A group creates a tableaux scene (a frozen picture) to visualize emotions and presents their tableaux to the rest of the class, who are supposed to guess the scene and say why people might feel such emotions. In terms of developing communicative competence, students learn the fundamental principles of narration and storytelling, simultaneously perceiving the basics of non-verbal communication, understanding emotions (frozen moment), teamwork, and empathy.

Living Sculptures/Human Machines technique has proved to be beneficial for both describing actions/functions, giving instructions, sequencing, and at the same time has taught the students the skills of

collaboration, non-verbal communication, problem-solving, and understanding cause-and-effect.

Pantomiming/Miming is a valuable tool for English language teaching, offering a fun and engaging way to enhance vocabulary, grammar, and communication skills. By acting out words, phrases, and even stories without speaking, students develop a deeper understanding of language and improve their non-verbal communication skills, observation skills, and empathy, expressing emotions without words.

Results and Data Analysis. Preliminary analysis of the data indicates that the students who participated in drama-based activities showed significant improvements in emotional expression, empathy, and collaboration. The pre-assessment revealed that many students initially struggled with articulating their emotions and reported feeling disconnected from their peers. After being engaged in drama activities, students exhibited greater emotional awareness and positive changes in their ability to collaborate with groupmates. The post-assessment highlighted an increase in emotional resilience, as students reported feeling better equipped to handle stress and emotional challenges.

The surveys combined Likert-scale items with open-ended questions. The initial survey assessed students' baseline confidence in speaking English, their emotional awareness, and their ability to collaborate and empathize. The final survey, administered after the implementation of drama-based activities, aimed to capture shifts in these areas.

Quantitative data revealed a noticeable increase in students' perceived communicative competence. The majority of participants (86%) reported greater fluency, improved pronunciation and intonation, and enhanced vocabulary recall, particularly in context-rich situations such as role plays and dramatized dialogues. Many students (68%) indicated that they felt more confident speaking spontaneously and engaging in conversations without prior preparation.

In terms of SEL, students demonstrated significant growth in emotional awareness and

empathy. Post-survey results showed higher levels of comfort in expressing emotions in English and greater understanding of character motivations and social dynamics. 78% of students particularly emphasized that activities such as dubbing and acting out emotionally charged scenes helped them connect language to feelings, promoting a deeper, more meaningful use of English.

Qualitative responses supported the quantitative findings. Thematic analysis of open-ended survey items and classroom observations revealed recurring themes of increased self-confidence, collaborative engagement, and heightened emotional insight. The majority of students (88%) highlighted that working in groups, stepping into different roles, and interpreting non-verbal cues helped them develop not only linguistic skills but also interpersonal and emotional competencies. These findings confirm that drama-based techniques had a positive and holistic impact on learners, contributing to both their communicative development and social-emotional growth.

Conclusion. This action research project demonstrates the effectiveness of drama techniques in fostering emotional intelligence and social-emotional learning in the classroom. By providing students with opportunities to explore and express their emotions through dramatic activities, educators can promote emotional resilience, empathy, and collaboration. In light of the trauma and stress faced by students due to global and local events, incorporating drama into SEL offers a promising approach to supporting their emotional well-being. Future research could further explore the long-term impact of drama on students' social-emotional development and academic engagement. In addition to the previously discussed techniques, several other creative drama activities were explored to enhance both emotional expression and language development. These activities support critical thinking, collaboration, and creative language use, offering students opportunities to develop linguistic and emotional intelligence simultaneously.

Overall, taking all the above-mentioned into consideration, we must admit that the implementation of drama techniques in the EFL classroom is an irreplaceable multifunctional tool. It not only assists in developing students' communicative

competence but also supports them in hard times, creates social bonds, motivates learning, boosts sensitivity, creativity, imagination, self-confidence, self-awareness, empathy, collaboration, adaptivity, relaxation, memory, and language advancement.

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