

# Short Plays and Drama in EFL Classrooms as Perceived by Secondary School Students: the Role and Impact

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## Abstract

This quantitative study investigates the role and impact of short plays and drama on English as a foreign language (EFL) students. A total of 72 students from a secondary school in North Kalimantan in Indonesia participated in the study. Data was collected through a questionnaire consisting of 8 items, which were later classified into three different focuses of inquiries; psychological, instrumental, and pedagogical aspects. The study results indicate that secondary school students viewed short play from the three perspectives positively. Findings also suggest that the application of short play in EFL classrooms must be preceded by a careful selection of literary texts and careful planning of short play instructional design. Finally, the study calls for further attempts to integrate secondary school EFL curriculum and literature, implying the needs for appropriate drama-based activity pedagogy and professional development programs.

**Keywords:** literature; secondary schools; short play; students' views; drama-based activities

## Introduction

Despite the continuing transition from being favored to being removed and now back to being endorsed again, the significance of literature in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms has been widely recognized. Literature provides learners with everyday communication language, which is beneficial for a communicative purpose. Besides, Chan

(1999) argues that literature contributes to students' language awareness and sensitivity and fosters creativity and imagination. Other scholars also support the claim that using literature in language classes could improve linguistic fluency, cultural awareness, and critical thinking (Davidheiser, 2007; Ghosn, 2002). In addition, Paran (2008) has found evidence of how motivating and engaging literature is and its value for language learners. In other words, literature enables EFL learners to focus more on meaning rather than form.

Not only does literature enhance students' knowledge of the language, but effective teaching of appropriate literature forms will also likely promote intercultural

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communication competence. One supporting argument highlights the role of literature to help students understand the culture of a particular country critically while taking account of social contexts and their profiles to produce new meaning (Puig, 2020). Moreover, by being exposed to diversity and varieties of Englishes and cultures through studying literature, the ability to make meaningful interpretations and produce appropriate responses is also developed (Hall, 2020). This issue implies that literature enables students to connect their language learning and its value in wider frames, strengthening their identity as language learners.

It is important to understand the benefits offered by literature. It is equally important to recognize several debates that have been around for a while, centered upon using this verbal art in language learning. Widdowson (1985) states that there is resistance to the incorporation of literature into language study since it can be “damaging to the essential power of literature to evoke feelings and disclose the truth of life” (p.182). In a more instrumental setting, literary materials are regarded as not effective in helping learners enhance reading skills (Lee, 1986). Meanwhile, Edmonson (1997) argues that literature has nothing special that can increase motivation to nurture language learning. Literary texts are not superior to other texts used for language teaching purposes. The situation just described finally impacted the teaching or use of literature in the classrooms.

Nevertheless, the integration of literature into the EFL academic curriculum has been regaining attention in recent years (Bobkina & Dominguez, 2014). The literary texts used in

this respect also take various forms. It can be seen from the growing number of multiple studies conducted in these areas: a study investigating students’ views of the benefits offered by *short stories* and *poems and songs* in secondary schools in Hong Kong (Tsang et al., 2020), a study analyzing Brazilian students’ perspectives on *iconicity* workshop (Viana and Zyngier, 2019), and a more recent one by Sun (2021) which investigates the use of *novels* in reading programs for students in China. Various forms of literature can be exploited in EFL classrooms; however, as Puig (2020) claims, one literary form would be enough to help students gain more excellent “knowledge and understanding of the culture and society of the language studied (p.17). Accordingly, this study has focused on only one form of literary texts, short plays, which initially belongs to a drama-based activity.

Short plays and drama could be an asset in language learning since they affect learners’ language development. Wongsa and Son (2020) conducted an empirical research that looked into the role of drama-based activities in an EFL classroom in a secondary school in Thailand. The result showed that drama-based activities successfully improved students’ verbal communication skills. The study also pointed out the psychological element in which students felt enjoyment and fewer threats during the learning process. Other studies investigated the role of plays in nurturing vocabulary effectively and accurately in diverse contexts (Alshraideh & Alahmdi, 2020) and facilitating creativity and innovation in the classrooms (Hulse & Owens, 2017).

Given the empirical evidence, understanding the role and impact of short plays and drama

from EFL students' points of view is required. Students' perspectives on a learning environment influence their attitudes in the classroom, resulting in the efficacy of teaching and learning instructions (Brown, 2009). For example, a student who views text-based teaching positively tends to get involved and engaged outstandingly in the learning activities, contributing to the successful application of the general class instructions. On the other hand, a student with negative views of the same approach is more likely to resist, thus failing the learning instructions. In the context of literature in EFL classrooms, as suggested by Bobkina and Dominguez (2014), understanding students' perspectives will provide teachers with valuable inputs on language, curriculum development, and lesson planning. However, the number of studies on the role and impact of short plays and drama on EFL students, seen from psychological, instrumental, and pedagogical, remain limited, especially in Indonesian secondary schools. The present study seeks to explore this particular area.

#### **Literature in EFL classrooms in Indonesia**

Since the implementation of the 2004 curriculum, which is a competency-based curriculum (CBC) or Kurikulum Berbasis Kompetensi in Bahasa Indonesia, EFL teaching in Indonesia has undergone considerable changes, specifically in the practices of language pedagogy in the classroom as well as language assessment (Widodo, 2016). The 2013 ELT curriculum and the 2021 Merdeka curriculum, with the latter being partially implemented in several schools across the country, are no exception. Nonetheless, the secondary school ELT curriculums in Indonesia, from time to time, seem to share something in

common, which is the focus on text-types language materials (e.g., narrative, descriptive, recount, exposition, reports, procedures). With this fact, it seems apparent that literature has no special place in the curriculum design. Even if the curriculums modestly provide literary texts, such as songs and short stories, teachers tend to solely treat these forms of literature instrumentally due to the rigid nature of Indonesia's curriculums.

EFL teachers see an opportunity in the latest 2021 curriculum. As stated in the proposed learning achievements, curriculum design suggests the use of authentic texts in EFL classes in secondary schools (Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology, 2021). Teachers can widely interpret this mention. They can think of authentic materials in TV shows, commercials, postcards, and of course, literature works. However, what I have learned from previous curriculums is that the integration of literature in EFL classrooms is mostly overlooked. It often interferes with the nature of the public standardized test, which barely includes literary texts. Consequently, students' motivation to learn this genre may be affected as it is not formally assessed by their teachers (Tsang & Paran, 2021). The present study sheds some light on the values offered by literature, represented by role-plays and drama, in secondary schools, which are still underexplored, according to Tsang et al. (2020). By understanding the implication, role, and impact of short plays and drama on EFL students, Indonesian teachers would be able to carefully consider the incorporation of this particular literary form into their EFL classrooms while ensuring its significance in students' language development.

### Research Questions

Grounded on the empirical evidence discussed above, the research question of the present study is as follows:

What are the role and impact of short plays and drama on EFL students, seen from psychological, instrumental, and pedagogical perspectives?

### Method

#### Participants

The present study participants were secondary school students in a government school in North Kalimantan in Indonesia. They had been studying EFL for at least 4 to 5 years and were recruited via purposive sampling. Online questionnaires were distributed to a total of 138 students. However, only 72 questionnaires were returned. The only possible explanation for this phenomenon is the sudden close-down of the school when distributing the questionnaire due to the immediate outbreak of the Covid-19 virus in the area, resulting in the decreased engagement of the students. The 72 participants consisted of 32 female students and 40 male students between 16 to 19 years old. According to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), their English proficiency is around the B1 or B2 level.

#### The Short Play

Various forms of literary work can be used to examine students' perceptions of the role and impact of drama in EFL classes. However, in this study, I mainly selected a short play entitled *The Ticket*, written by Herbert Puchta, Gunter Gerngross, and Matthew Devitt in their book

entitled "21 sketches and plays for young learners and teens". There were several reasons why this text was chosen, including (1) the availability of the authentic resources, both in the forms of audio recording and written text, (2) its familiar yet rich use of everyday language, (3) the appropriateness of time duration required to perform the play, and (4) the possibility of different culture and linguistic features exploration.

Short plays can be regarded as a one-act drama-based activity in which actors play certain scenes in a short period. Therefore, even though short plays cannot be generalized as drama, they somehow hold similar characteristics. Davies (1990) explains that in a drama, students act either under the script prepared by teachers or freely. He further adds that students must interact with each other in a meaningful manner. Therefore, to avoid ambiguity, I perceive short plays as another form of drama-based activity in this study.

In EFL teaching and learning, drama-based activities are quite popular among teachers, especially as another option for speaking activities. Several benefits are offered by drama for EFL classrooms. First of all, drama-based activities contribute to students' speaking skills improvement, attitudes, and motivation (Hulse & Owens, 2017; Iamsaard & Kerdpol, 2015; Rojabi & Mustafa, 2021; Wongsu & Son, 2020). Additionally, drama stimulates further "discussion or written work going far beyond the acting out of scenes" (Davies, 1990, p. 97). Finally, the drama also allows the creative use of foreign language in real-life situations and fosters intercultural understanding. To sum up, short play and drama in EFL classes meaningfully enrich language learning.

### The Instructional Design

The short play was introduced in five sessions within five weeks, each with a different language teaching pedagogy. Each session lasted for 90 minutes. The pedagogy in this study was adopted from the one proposed by

Davies (1990), which consists of five stages; discussion, presentation, practice, further practice, and free stage. Figure 1 presents the descriptions of activities done by the research participants.

**Figure 1**  
*Short play instructional design*

Meeting	Researcher	Students
Week 1:	- The teacher played the audio recording of the short play	- Students listened to the recording and answered the questions given
	- The teacher distributed the script	- Students read the script
	- The teacher played the recording again	- In a group of three, students made notes on specific aspects, such as intonation and stress, as well as the speakers' attitudes and expressions
	- The teacher facilitated a discussion	- Students discussed and compared their opinions with the whole class (extended activity)
Week 2:	- The teacher monitored students' pronunciation and fluency	- Several students read aloud the script of the short play
	- The teacher addressed the pronunciation and fluency issues	- Students practiced their pronunciation and fluency ( <i>communicative skills exploitation</i> )
	- The teacher gave reading and vocabulary assignments	- Students did the assignments together with the partner ( <i>linguistics exploitation</i> )
	- The teacher facilitated a discussion on the assignments	- Students discussed the answer together with the whole class (extended activity)
Week 3:	- The teacher facilitated a free practice in the classroom	- Students practiced their lines and rehearsed their performances
	- The teacher guided students to prepare the properties and tools needed for the play	- Within their groups, students made a list of the properties and tools needed for the performance (collaborative preparation)
Week 4:	- The teacher monitored and wrote feedbacks on each group's performance	- Each group performed the short play in front of the class

Week 5:	- The teacher discussed the feedbacks on the groups' performances	- Students presented their thoughts and opinions on the feedback given
	- The teacher distributed a group assessment	- Within their groups, students assessed their performances

### The Questionnaire

The questionnaire was constructed with the inclusion of three different focus of enquiries: psychological (2 items), instrumental (4 items), and pedagogical aspect (2 items). The psychological items looked into participants' affective elements, particularly their motivation and interests in the chosen literature (numbers 1 & 2). Moreover, the

instrumental items were employed to investigate participants' perceptions of the language-focused works, i.e., vocabulary mastery, speaking skill, reading ability, and knowledge of other cultures (number 3-6, respectively). Finally, the pedagogical items indicated participants' views of the learning atmosphere and students' interaction during literature class (numbers 7 & 8). Figure 2 shows the questionnaire items.

**Figure 2**  
*Set of items in the questionnaire*

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1) Short play increases my motivation to learn English				
2) Short play is interesting to study				
3) Short play improves my mastery of English vocabulary				
4) Short play improves my speaking ability				
5) Short play helps me understand English text better				
6) Short play increases my knowledge of other's culture				
7) Short play improves learning atmosphere in the classroom				
8) Short play increases students' interaction				

These eight items were written in Bahasa Indonesia (participants' L1) to help them better understand the statements. As the researcher

checked the questionnaire's validity, it was piloted with 10 participants. Based on the comments received, the researcher changed

several items in terms of their wording for greater clarity. The 4-point Likert scale was used to get specific responses from participants (4=strongly agree, 3=agree, 2=disagree, and 1=strongly disagree). Finally, the questionnaire was distributed to participants in a Google online form using the WhatsApp application. As for the ethic of the research, participants were informed that participation was not mandatory. Therefore, they were allowed not to give responses. This process occurred in the fifth

session, which was unfortunately conducted online.

### Data Analysis

The nature of this study is quantitative, aiming to find out participants' views of the role and impact of short plays and drama in EFL classrooms. The collected data were analyzed based on participants' responses to each of the statements in the questionnaire.

**Table 1**  
*The proportion of each item in the questionnaire*

	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		N	M
	<i>f</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>n</i>		
1. Short play increases my motivation to learn English	18	72	52	156	2	4	232	3.22
2. Short play is interesting to study	22	88	48	144	2	4	236	3.28
3. Short play improves my mastery of English vocabulary	20	80	50	150	2	4	234	3.25
4. Short play improves my speaking ability	25	100	44	132	3	6	238	3.31
5. Short play helps me understand English text better	19	76	50	150	3	6	232	3.22
6. Short play increases my knowledge of other's culture	16	64	52	156	4	8	228	3.17
7. Short play improves the learning atmosphere in the classroom	27	108	42	126	3	6	240	3.33
8. Short play increases students' interaction	31	124	39	117	2	4	245	3.40

*f* = number of students

*n* = score

N = total score

M = Mean

Table 1 shows the overview of the collected data. First, the total score for each item (N) was calculated based on all participants' answers on

the Likert scale (4=strongly agree, 3=agree, 2=disagree, and 1=strongly disagree). Then, a further calculation was done to find out the



mean score (M) for each of these items. It can be seen from this table that out of all the eight items presented, no item scored the lowest Likert scale point (1), indicating that no participant was choosing the option “strongly disagree”. Furthermore, the mean score of every item also sits above point 3, indicating participants’ agreement with the statements given.

Meanwhile, table 2 presents participants’ answers concerning the focus of enquiring (psychological, instrumental, and pedagogical

aspects). Their responses on each aspect were calculated by adding the total score of the items belonging to each aspect (numbers 1 & 2=psychological aspect, numbers 3-6=the fami aspect, and numbers 5 & 6= pedagogical aspect). The scores for each aspect were then categorized into the term ‘positive’ covering “strongly agree” and “agree” responses, and negative, that includes “disagree” and “strongly disagree” responses. Finally, the proportion of each category in the form of a percentage was also counted.

**Table 2**  
*The proportion of each aspect*

Aspect	Items	Positive		Negative		Total
		N	%	N	%	
1. Psychological	2	460	98.29	8	1.71	468
2. Instrumental	4	908	97.42	24	2.58	932
3. Pedagogical	2	475	97.94	10	2.06	485

### Findings

This study investigates the role and impact of short plays and drama on secondary school students. Overall, as seen in table 1, the average point (M) gained by every item in the questionnaire was relatively good (the mean is between 3 and 4), indicating that the participants of the present study generally have the same positive view toward short plays and drama use in their EFL classroom.

Many students agreed that short play increases students’ interaction in the EFL classroom. Therefore, it gained the highest score (N=245, M=3.40) among all the other items in the questionnaire. On the contrary, several students opposed the idea that short

plays could increase the knowledge of other cultures, making this particular item gain the lowest total score (N=228, M=3.17). Furthermore, students generally agreed that short play improved the EFL learning atmosphere and their speaking ability, with a score of 240 (M=3.33) and 238 (M=3.31), respectively. Next, according to the participants, the short play was interesting to study (N=236, M=3.28), and they could improve their mastery of vocabulary (N=234, M=3.25). Finally, students agreed that short play increased motivation to learn English and helped them understand English text better (N=232/M=3.22 for both items).

Concerning the role and impact of short plays and drama in EFL classrooms, which are



seen from three different perspectives; psychological, instrumental, and pedagogical; students' viewpoints were overall very positive in all these three aspects. The psychological aspect attained the highest proportion with 98.29%, while the pedagogical aspect came second with 97.94%. Meanwhile, the instrumental aspect came last with 97.42%.

## Discussion

As mentioned earlier in this paper, a short play in this study was another form of drama-based activity. Consequently, most empirical studies I referred to in the following discussion are likely to correlate with the role of drama in EFL language teaching and learning. The researcher hopes, then, that it will not give any rise to confusion. As predicted, most secondary school students agreed that short plays and drama play significant roles in the English classroom and positively impact their language development. The coming sections will look closely into the students' views from psychological, instrumental, and pedagogical perspectives.

### Psychological Aspect

The findings reveal the participants' positive attitudes toward the role of short plays in their EFL classrooms, in the sense that they felt more motivated to learn English and that they found the short play interesting to learn. One of the justifiable explanations for this tendency is that short plays and drama allow the use of understandable everyday English in real-life contexts, which can be of great value to students. Also, the existence of natural communication by deploying the foreign language being learned, in turn, will allow students to be able to transfer their emotions

without tension and experience emotions authentically (Iamsaard & Kerdpol, 2015). As a result, there is a strong possibility of short plays igniting the spark of EFL learning, making it a lot more enjoyable and meaningful.

Another argument for this finding is the nature of the short play itself. Like any other literature, short plays are also personally relevant. It often contains essential issues for human beings: love, life, and relationship (Hall, 2020), and even humor, of which commercial textbooks often lack. Furthermore, this personal relevance is often connected to students' stronger feelings toward the learning topic, making it not easily forgotten (Halim Ulas, 2008). According to Batdı and Batdı (2015), "creative drama had a major impact on affective domains such as creating a feeling of love towards learning" (p.1466) and allowing students to feel a sense of accomplishment. Due to this supportive ambiance of learning, it is justifiable that the present study participants are inclined to feel motivated and interested in the learning process.

This finding somehow leads us to another discussion: the literary texts selection. It is unlikely that the students will experience a similar learning atmosphere when the prepared scripts do not match their competence levels. Let us say if the students have to perform a short play adapted from one of Shakespeare's works (e.g., Hamlet, Macbeth, Othello, or The Merchant of Venice), with its highly sophisticated English, would it be possible for these secondary school students to enjoy the EFL learning, let alone understand the content of the short play? The answer to this question is, possibly and reasonably, no. Instead, the complicated language will likely cause students

to feel anxious or frustrated. For this reason, the selection process of literary texts must then be taken very seriously by EFL teachers. As argued by Novianti (2016) and Davies (1990), texts should be of interest to students and suitable for their English proficiency to enable them to play, please, and enjoy, which are central aspects of successful language learning (Bigelow, 2019).

### **Instrumental Aspect**

This quantitative study shows that the participants generally agree that the short play has improved their English speaking ability. This finding is consistent with the findings of previous research, which highlighted the effect of drama-based activities on students' communicative skills (Iamsaard & Kerdpol, 2015; Torrico, 2014; Wongsu & Son, 2020). It is believed that the familiarity with the topic of the short play itself and the kind of target language used were contributing factors to the improvement of this particular language skill. Short plays and drama in EFL classrooms enable students to use English for general conversation, which involves the use of familiar vocabularies and, presumably, the absence of complicated sentence structures. They result in increased confidence and motivation to actively participate in learning activities (Wongsu & Son, 2020).

The findings also indicate that the use of short play has increased the secondary school students' acquisition of English vocabulary and comprehension of English text. This finding aligns with the result of a previous study by Alshraideh and Alahmdi (2020). They reported that when students perform their work through drama, they will likely understand and retain "the meanings of the words and expressions

more effectively than rote memorization" (p.43). Moreover, Lendvay (2016) claims that drama-based activity can help students acquire new vocabulary through its multifaceted processes. This issue suggests that learning English vocabulary in a real-life context and being able to use it in a similar situation outside the classroom is considered an effective technique for learning English vocabulary and text.

Apart from the three elements discussed above, the present study participants also believe that short play has the potential to enhance their cultural knowledge. According to Farrah et al. (2021), while studying English through drama-based activities, students are encouraged to negotiate meanings by thinking critically about the differences within societies. As a result, it would be more likely to gain new information dealing with others' lifestyles and traditions. This argument is supported by Choi (2004), who emphasizes that drama allows students' sensitivity in a global context through its rich socio-cultural and intercultural practices. Possessing sufficient knowledge about others' cultures will enable students to be more successful in intercultural communication, in which misunderstanding can be minimized or even avoided.

### **Pedagogical Aspect**

Compared to other literary texts, such as novels, short stories, and songs, which require students to exercise their passive study skills (reading and repeating), a short play and other drama-based activities enable students to learn by doing and experiencing (Angelianawati, 2019). Students are encouraged to communicate with each other and talk in the target language (English), while benefitting

from non-verbal communication, such as facial expressions and the movements of the body (Alshraideh & Alahmdi, 2020). Therefore, when using a short play in an EFL classroom, a greater emphasis is given to fluency and communication than lexical items (Torrico, 2014). Moreover, along with preparing and performing the acts, students will be required to work collaboratively with peers (Güryay, 2015; Wongsu & Son, 2020), thus increasing interactions in the EFL classroom.

The results of the present study corroborate these arguments. It can be seen from the students' interaction element, which earned the highest average point among all the other elements ( $M=3.40$ ). Moreover, the present study participants also expressed their agreement on the improved learning atmosphere as a result of the use of short plays in their EFL class. It can be concluded then that from the pedagogical perspective, short plays and drama are viewed positively by these secondary school students. Having a closer look into this aspect, we now understand how this issue relates to the student-centredness of short plays and drama. According to Rojabi and Mustafa (2021), the creative learning environment provided by drama is a major determinant of rich experiences and active roles of learners, which is favored by the participants of this study. This finding suggests that EFL teachers play a significant role in facilitating interaction by employing creative pedagogical practices. As argued by To et al. (2011), the more balanced interaction created in the classroom will likely impact the more successful learning of the target language (English).

Therefore, teachers' ability to exploit their short plays and drama teaching techniques has become of utmost importance, without which EFL classrooms would be less meaningful. However, Nanda and Susanto (2021) pinpoint that teachers lack drama-based pedagogy knowledge and skills, and this can hinder the successful application of short play in EFL classes. Therefore, this study calls for an immediate response from the curriculum designer of teacher education to consider incorporating drama-based activity pedagogy into its curriculum or as part of teacher professional development programs (Farrah et al., 2021).

## Conclusion

This paper has looked into the role and impact of short plays and drama on EFL students in a secondary school. The psychological aspect covered in this study were motivation and interests, while the instrumental aspect included acquired vocabulary, speaking skills, reading skills, and knowledge of other cultures. Lastly, the pedagogical aspect included the learning atmosphere and students' interactions.

Based on the findings, it is evident that short plays and drama have increased secondary school students' motivation to study and use English in their EFL classrooms. The joy and pleasure brought by this literature form, combined with the presence of personal relevance, have also made EFL classes more attractive. Furthermore, besides having a significant impact on students' language development (increased vocabulary, improved communication skills, and better understanding of English texts), role-plays and drama have

provided insights into other cultures, which are important to fostering students' intercultural communication competence. Finally, short plays and drama in EFL classrooms have also affected the EFL learning atmosphere. It has become more student-centered and engaging, thus increasing secondary school students' interaction.

The present study opens the door for EFL classroom transformation, especially in secondary schools. It has implications for further incorporation of literature, in particular short plays and drama, into EFL secondary school curriculum. However, several study limitations somehow remain. The data used in this study were solely gathered from a

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- questionnaire. Qualitative data are needed to do a more rigorous interrogation of assumptions and beliefs. Future researchers, therefore, are encouraged to collect data by using other techniques, such as interviews, open-ended questions, classroom observation, and reflective journals, to be able to look into students' voices more thoroughly. Moreover, the scale of this study is considered too small. Prospective studies could consider having a larger scale of research by involving students from different schools. Finally, The use of other literary texts (i.e., novels, short stories, poems, and songs) can be investigated in EFL classrooms to see the impact on secondary school students.
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