



Enhancing Communication Skills through On-Stage Performance-Based Activities in the Foreign Language Classroom

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ABSTRACT: The study examines the effectiveness of on-stage performance-based literary activities in developing practical language skills in foreign language classrooms in the context of Vietnamese higher education. In Vietnam, traditional language teaching methods are often focused on grammar, vocabulary memorization and written exams, which can limit students' opportunities for authentic communication and active participation. To address the above problem, the research proposes the employment of dramatization, role-play, storytelling, poetry performance and simulated discussions to English literature lessons at Hanoi Law University. The research is grounded in the theories of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and Social Constructivism, which stress authentic interaction, cooperation and learner-centered education. This study, by adopting an action research approach, explores the effect of performance-based activities on students' speaking fluency, pronunciation, confidence, creativity, critical thinking and teamwork skills. The data collection involved classroom observations, student feedback and interviews.

Findings suggest that the on-stage performance activities greatly enhance students' communicative competence, motivation and engagement. Students grew in confidence in using English and in their active involvement in literary interpretation. The study concludes that performance-based learning is an innovative and effective way to develop practical language skills in the context of foreign language education regardless of the challenges such as exam-oriented systems and cultural barriers.

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Published Online:

June 02, 2026

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KEYWORDS:

Performance-based learning, Communicative Language Teaching, Drama in language education, Speaking skills development, Vietnamese higher education, Action research

Cite the Article: Nguyen, H.T.T. (2026). *Enhancing Communication Skills through On-Stage Performance-Based Activities in the Foreign Language Classroom*. *International Journal of Human Research and Social Science Studies*, 3(6), 531-537. <https://doi.org/10.55677/ijhrsss/04-2026-Vol03I06>

INTRODUCTION

In the present period of globalization and international integration, the importance of foreign language communication has been increased. English, in particular, functions as a world language of education, business, diplomacy, technology and intercultural communication. Therefore, the emphasis in the area of foreign language teaching has been moved from the memorization of grammatical structures to the development of communicative competence and communication skills. Linguistic rules must be understood by language learners who are now expected to apply language effectively in authentic social and professional contexts. This transformation has led educators to embrace learner-centered and communicative approaches that involve students actively in the learning process.

In particular, traditional methods of foreign language teaching such as grammar-translation and lecture-based methods tend to emphasize memorization of vocabulary, grammar exercises and written exams. These methods may contribute to students' acquisition of theoretical knowledge, but they rarely provide sufficient opportunities for real communication and practical application of the language. As Douglas (2000) states, learning a language is not only a matter of learning grammatical structures,

but also a matter of using language meaningfully and appropriately in real life situations. Students who have been taught mostly through passive instruction may have lots of theoretical knowledge, but do not know how to communicate well in spoken interaction. Literature has been more and more recognized as a resource of language education due to its exposure to authentic language, different cultural views and meaningful human experiences by learners. Literature is a major contributor to the development of learners' linguistic competence through the provision of language in context (Carter and McRae, 2001). Literary texts also promote interpretation, emotional involvement, creativity and critical thinking. Literature can also enhance all four language skills: reading, writing, and listening and speaking.

In the last decades, researchers and teachers have researched new ways for the integration of literature into communicative language teaching. The introduction of performance-based activities in foreign language classrooms is one of the especially efficient ways. Drama, role-play, storytelling, poetry performance and simulated discussions offer opportunities for learners to use language actively, collaboratively and creatively. These activities make students active participants in the process of exchanging ideas, negotiating meaning and emotionally connecting with literature instead of being passive recipients of information.

There is a wealth of research support for the effectiveness of drama-based and performance-based learning. Yimwilai (2015) also found that drama-based techniques improved students' reading attitudes, critical thinking skills and academic achievement. Luo et al. (2024) similarly found that process drama significantly improves learner involvement, communicative competence, and language proficiency in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) settings. These findings suggest that performance-based activities help language learning as well as confidence, creativity, collaboration and motivation.

In Vietnam, educational reforms have increasingly emphasized communicative competence and learner-centered approaches in language education. The National Foreign Languages Project (2008–2025) was approved by Decision No. 1400/QĐ-TTg with the objective of improving learners' capacity to use foreign languages effectively in academic and professional settings (MOET, 2008). Furthermore, the General Education Program implemented by the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET, 2018) emphasizes competency-based education, creativity, teamwork, communication, and critical thinking. Such reforms are conducive to the implementation of innovative teaching methods such as performance-based literary activities.

Many universities in Vietnam still put too much emphasis on traditional teacher-centered instruction, despite these reforms. For instance, at Hanoi Law University, the English literature courses are typically taught through lectures, text analysis, and written tests. These approaches help students to understand literary theories and academic writing, but they provide little opportunity for authentic communication, oral interaction and creative expression. Even with a great deal of theoretical knowledge, students may become passive learners who have problems in developing communication Skills.

The innovation "On-Stage Performance-Based Literary Activities" aims at solving these problems by integrating dramatization, role-play, poetry writing, storytelling and interactive performance into the foreign language classroom. Such an approach creates a dynamic learning process where students are actively involved in studying literature and at the same time improve communication skills. Learners develop speaking fluency, pronunciation and listening skills, creativity, confidence, teamwork and critical thinking skills through group performances and creative interpretation.

The article investigates the effectiveness and educational value of on-stage performance-based literary activities in developing communication skills in foreign language classrooms. The article reviews relevant literature and theoretical frameworks, describes the methods and implementation of the project, analyzes the educational outcomes and cultural considerations, and offers recommendations for future practice. Finally, the study reveals that performance-based literary activities are a powerful and innovative approach for communicative language teaching in the Vietnamese higher education.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature in Foreign Language Teaching

Literature has long been considered a useful device in the teaching of language with the aim of improving the linguistic and the communicative competence. Literary texts expose the students to authentic language use, diverse vocabulary, cultural insights and emotional experiences. According to Carter and McRae (2001), literature offers learners meaningful language in context and shows them how language works naturally in social interaction. In literary works, language is a living medium of communication, not isolated grammar exercises.

Literature also invites students to respond intellectually and emotionally to texts. Students will read stories, plays, poems and novels to explore human experiences, cultural values and social issues. Such engagement enhances learner motivation and awareness with respect to language and meaning. Douglas (2000) maintains that successful language learning is not only about linguistic competence but also about the ability to interpret meaning and communicate successfully in different contexts.

Literature also helps in the development of all four language skills. Reading literature improves vocabulary and comprehension. Writing activities based on literature encourage creative and analytic expression. Discussions, performances, and collaborative interpretation develop speaking and listening skills. Thus, literature is a multidimensional tool of language education.

Communicative Language Teaching Method (CLT)

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) emerged as a reaction to traditional grammar-based language teaching. CLT draws on the theories of Dell Hymes, which have been further developed by Canale and Swain (1980) and emphasize communicative competence over grammatical accuracy. Communicative competence comprises grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence and strategic competence.

The essence of CLT is real communication and meaningful interaction. Learners are encouraged to use language for real purposes such as expressing opinions, negotiating meaning, solving problems and participating in social interaction. Typical activities in CLT are role play, discussion, interview, simulation and group work.

The on-stage performance-based literary activities are highly aligned with CLT principles due to their nature of requiring students to communicate meaningfully in real life contexts. In drama and role-play activities, students use language spontaneously to express ideas, respond to others and work together collaboratively. These experiences help to develop fluency, pronunciation, confidence and pragmatic competence in the learners.

CLT also fosters learner-centered education. Teachers are not transmitters of information. They are facilitators who provide opportunities for interaction and communication. The shift from teacher-centered to learner-centered instruction is especially important in education where passivity is still the norm.

Social Constructivism and Collaborative Learning

The theory of Social Constructivism developed by Lev Vygotsky (1978) provides another important theoretical foundation for performance-based language learning. Vygotsky emphasized that learning is fundamentally a social process. Knowledge is constructed through interaction, collaboration, and communication with others.

Vygotsky's theory is based on the concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). It is the difference between what a learner can do independently and what they can do with help or collaboration. Students engage in collaborative learning activities where they help each other develop by solving problems together and communicating.

Performance-based activities promote collaborative learning in a natural way. Students collaborate to rehearse performances, interpret texts, negotiate meaning, and give peer feedback. Within this process, learners are co-constructing knowledge and internalizing language skills. Group interaction also reduces anxiety and increases confidence, because the responsibility is shared among the participants.

Social constructivism also claims that learning is more meaningful when it occurs in authentic social contexts. Emotionally engaging situations arise in on-stage performances where language is used meaningfully, not just mechanically. Learners do not communicate just to complete exercises, but to express emotion, tell stories, interpret characters, and connect with audiences.

Drama-Based Learning in EFL Contexts

Drama-based learning has gained much attention in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education for its potential to enhance communication skills and learner involvement. The drama activities are role-play, improvisation, simulations, storytelling and theatrical performance. These techniques allow real interaction and emotional involvement.

Yimwilai (2015) found out that drama-based teaching had a significantly positive effect on students' reading attitude, critical thinking skills, and academic achievement. Instead of simply studying literature in an abstract manner, theatre encourages active involvement and a deeper connection with texts as students have to transform into characters and derive meanings.

Luo et al. (2024) conducted a systematic review of process drama in the EFL contexts and found that drama-based education positively impacts communicative competence, language proficiency, and learner motivation. The review noted that drama activities promote social interaction, creativity and real-life communication.

Drama, Stinson and Freebody (2006) also argued, encourages empathy, creativity and critical thinking in language learning. Through role-play and performance students explore different points of view and build emotional understanding. Such experiences contribute not only to linguistic development but also to personal development and to intercultural awareness.

Drama-based instruction improves speaking fluency, pronunciation, collaboration, and learner motivation, according to Pratiwi (2026). However, the study also highlighted that the effective application of mobile technologies is largely dependent on teacher training, classroom climate and institutional support.

Performance-based literary activities

The innovation integrated several types of performance-based literary activities into regular classroom instruction. In the English literature course, students must engage in the following activities, such as demonstrating critical analysis through reading and researching a variety of sources, comparing and contrasting the evidence, and evaluating the actions, attitudes, ideas, and arguments of characters. In order to analyze the situation and compare various viewpoints in regard to the writers' lives or historical circumstances, students have to comprehend the terms' deeper meanings beyond the explanation of the original language. Students make their own opinions and perceptions on a topic clear through discussions and arguments. They agreed with the defensive and logical interpretation based on the arguments. In literary drama performances, concerns or issues pertaining to the story's situations

are raised, and solutions are suggested in relation to current historical events, cultural disparities, and real-world ethical dilemmas. In order to promote initiative and critical thinking abilities, it is important to let students try out contemporary adaptations or different endings in contrast to the plots of the plays, novels, or poems. After every literary work, lessons are given that cover a range of interpretations from other fields, such as philosophy, psychology, and culture. Students take on character roles and reenacting incidents on stage in a more dynamic and adaptable manner to emphasize the works' themes and literary aesthetic characteristics. In addition to conducting simulated panel discussions with students posing as authors, literary critics, or historical individuals, the debates are organized to allow students to defend or critique literary characters, themes, or authors' viewpoints. Students are being encouraged to communicate their thoughts and feelings by learning and performing well-known soliloquies, such as Shakespearean monologues. It was also necessary to perform poetry with dramatic components using voice, gestures, and props, as well as to engage the audience in interactive storytelling and narration using expressive movements and sound effects. Promoting the rewriting of scenes in other genres, such as a story as a poem, a Shakespearean tragedy as a comedy, and poems as stories is also a task in the course.

Alternative forms of assessment were introduced to complement traditional written examinations, including:

- Performance appraisal
- Oral presentations.
- Peer assessment
- Group participation evaluation
- Assessment of creative project

These assessment methods were more aligned with the communicative goals of the project.

METHODS

Research Design

This study used an action research design to examine the effectiveness of on-stage performance based literary activities in improving students' communication skills. Action research is particularly suited for educational innovation as it enables teachers to identify problems in the classroom, implement pedagogical change, observe the effects and continuously improve instruction.

The study was designed to investigate the effects of performance-based literary activities on the students' speaking skills, communication skills, creativity, collaboration, motivation and engagement in the foreign language classroom.

Research Context

The project was implemented in the English literature classes of Hanoi Law University. The university setting has many characteristics common to the Vietnamese higher education system: teacher-centered instruction, assessment focused on examinations and few opportunities for genuine spoken communication.

Students in literature courses tend to be good readers and writers, but not so good at practical communication skills such as fluency in speaking, pronunciation, or spontaneous interaction. Traditional literature instruction focuses on lectures, text analysis and written examinations rather than communicative practice.

The innovation aimed to change this kind of learning environment into a more dynamic, communicative, learner-centered classroom by means of performance-based literary activities.

Participants

The participants were 67 undergraduate students who attended English literature courses in the academic year 2025-2026 at Hanoi Law University. Students came from different academic backgrounds and had different levels of English proficiency (ranging from A2 to C2). Most of the participants had some previous experience with traditional language teaching methods, but very little experience with drama-based or performance-based instruction. Many students initially were not confident in speaking English publicly and were not familiar with collaborative theatrical activities.

Instruments

The study used three main tools: classroom observations, student feedback journal diaries and semi-structured interviews. Classroom rehearsals, role-plays and literary performances were observed to study the communication skills, participation, confidence and collaboration of students. The observation notes were on the speaking fluency, pronunciation, interaction, creativity, and engagement in the classroom activities.

Student feedback was gathered through journals/diaries throughout the project. Students reflected on their learning experiences, feelings, challenges and growth after participating in performance-based activities. The journals helped to identify changes in students' confidence, motivation, teamwork and attitudes towards learning English through literature and performance.

Selected students were interviewed in a semi-structured format to gain a deeper understanding of their experiences after the intervention. The interview questions were related to students' perceptions on improvement in communication, confidence in public

speaking, collaboration, and challenges during performances. This combination of the three instruments allowed the researcher to collect rich qualitative data and enhance the reliability and validity of the findings of the study.

Data collection and analysis

Data were collected when the performance-based literary activities were executed in the academic year of 2025–2026 at Hanoi Law University. Qualitative data were collected from multiple sources, including classroom observations, student feedback journal diaries and semi-structured interviews. Students' communication skills, participation, confidence and interaction were monitored through regular classroom observations during rehearsals, role-plays, dramatic readings and stage performances. Students' progress and classroom dynamics were documented using observation notes and checklists.

At the end of major activities, student feedback journal diaries were collected to facilitate capturing student reflections, emotions, challenges, and perceptions of their learning experience. At the end of the project, semi-structured interviews were also conducted with selected students at different proficiency levels to gain more in-depth insights into students' communication development and their attitudes towards performance-based learning.

Qualitative thematic analysis was performed on the collected data. The researcher analyzed observation notes, journal entries, and interview transcripts for patterns and themes related to confidence in speaking, improvement in communication, collaboration, motivation, and engagement in the classroom. Using different instruments in triangulation of data can improve the reliability and validity of the findings.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Several significant educational outcomes have resulted from the use of on-stage performance-based literary activities. The observations, student feedback and interview results show that performance-based learning has a significant contribution in developing motivation, collaboration, creativity and speaking skills of learners, as well as a variety of challenges.

Speaking Skills Development

One of the main benefits was the development of students' oral communication skills. Students performed regularly, role-played and discussed to practice speaking English in authentic and meaningful contexts.

Many students demonstrated more fluency, clearer pronunciation and more confidence when speaking in public. Traditional classroom activities focused on memorization. Performance-based learning required spontaneous interaction and real-time communication.

Learners also showed improved responsiveness and listening skills through repeated rehearsal and performance. Students became more confident in making meaning, responding to peers, and keeping conversations going in English.

Motivation and Affective Engagement

Motivation is generally considered as an important factor in successful language learning. Traditional teacher-centered approaches may decrease learner engagement because students are passive recipients of information. Whereas performance-based activities create learning experiences that are dynamic and emotionally engaging.

Drama and storytelling can give learners a chance to play with language in a creative and emotional way. Students become emotionally involved with literature as they act out characters, interpret conflicts, and express feelings. This emotional connection helps to increase engagement and retention. "Collaborative performances also create community, a sense of collective achievement." Team work and positive peer interaction increase confidence in learners. Studies have shown that students who enjoy learning activities are more willing to communicate and take risks in language use. The performance-based activities made the classroom environment more dynamic and fun. Students were emotionally engaged with literary texts as they actively interpreted and embodied characters and themes.

The traditional lecture method of teaching literature can sometimes reduce motivation of learners as students are passively receiving information. On the contrary, dramatization and storytelling made literature a living and interactive experience. Collaborative performance generated excitement and stimulated students' active involvement. The activities were creative, social and meaningful, many learners said, which made them feel more motivated.

Development of Critical Thinking and Creativity

Higher order thinking skills were also improved by the innovation. Students were asked to analyze texts critically and to produce original interpretations through activities such as rewriting endings, writing poetry, and changing genres.

Students learned to be creative by experimenting with language, performance styles, and narrative structures. Simulated discussions allowed learners to evaluate ideas, compare perspectives, and connect literary themes to contemporary social issues. These skills are especially vital in modern education as they prepare learners for complex academic and professional environments.

Social learning and Collaboration

The project was very supportive of collaborative learning. Students worked together to plan performances, rehearse scenes, troubleshoot and give feedback. Group performances helped reduce anxiety because the responsibility was shared among participants. Mutual support and team work gave learners confidence. These findings support Vygotsky's theory that learning takes place through social interaction and collaborative meaning-making.

Cultural Problems

The implementation of the innovation was heavily influenced by cultural factors. Vietnamese education has had the emphasis on teacher authority, passive learning and performance in examination. Some students were initially hesitant to participate actively for fear of making mistakes and losing face among their peers. Performing in public in a foreign language was a source of anxiety for the less confident learners. But Vietnamese culture is also collective in nature, which also encouraged learning together. In general, students felt more comfortable performing in groups than in individual performances. Teachers played a key role in creating supportive learning environments. The students could adapt to the communicative learning methods with clear guidance, encouragement and a gradual introduction of activities.

Challenges of Performance-Based Learning

Performance-based learning, however, has its own set of challenges despite its many advantages. In examination-oriented educational systems teachers may feel the pressure to focus on grammar teaching and preparation for written tests. Communicative activities are seen as less academically valuable.

Large class sizes, limited classroom time, lack of resources and lack of teacher training may also impact implementation. Some students may also experience anxiety related to public speaking or performance, especially in cultures where the importance of maintaining social harmony and avoiding mistakes is emphasized.

In Vietnam, the Confucian educational traditions often stress teacher authority, passive learning, and respect for hierarchy. Pham and Renshaw (2015) claim that these cultural factors may initially discourage students from active participation in communicative and performance-based tasks. Hofstede (2001) similarly observes that collectivist cultures with high power distance may discourage open expression and public performance.

Nevertheless, Vietnamese collectivist culture can also support collaborative learning as students often feel more comfortable working in groups. Lack of supportive teachers, gradual implementation and clear guidance can help learners overcome anxiety and adapt to learner-centered approaches.

The literature as a whole makes a strong case for the use of performance-based literary activities in language education. These approaches enhance communicative competence, learner engagement, creativity, collaboration, and critical thinking. However, the successful implementation of CBE depends on the sensitivity to cultural contexts, institutional support and effective teacher preparation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The results of this study can generate several important recommendations for educators, institutions and curriculum designers to improve the implementation of on-stage performance-based literary activities in foreign language classrooms. First, teachers need professional development and special training in communicative language teaching, drama-based instruction, classroom management, and alternative assessment methods. In order to promote effective performance-based learning, teachers should have not only a command of the language but also the ability to facilitate interaction, encourage creativity and successfully manage collaborative activities. Moreover, teachers should build supportive and inclusive learning environments where students feel safe to express themselves, experiment with language and make mistakes without fear of criticism or embarrassment. This atmosphere is especially important in collectivist cultures like Vietnam, where students may be reluctant to actively participate in public performances initially. Thoughtful integration of performance-based activities with curriculum objectives and learning outcomes is also important to ensure academic relevance and institutional alignment. Teachers and curriculum designers should also adopt alternative forms of assessment such as performance evaluation, peer assessment, oral presentations and reflective tasks to evaluate students' communicative competence more effectively than traditional written examinations alone. Thus, collaborative learning is strongly suggested as group performances contribute to anxiety reduction, motivation improvement, teamwork and social interaction development. At the same time, activities should be differentiated according to the students' proficiency levels, confidence and learning needs so that all learners can access meaningfully. The use of technology can further improve performance-based learning through digital storytelling, video recording, online collaboration and multimedia presentations. Universities and other educational institutions also have a key role to play in supporting innovative teaching approaches, providing flexible curricula, adequate classroom resources and opportunities for teacher training. Finally, more research needs to be done on the long-term effect of performance-based learning on language acquisition, learner motivation, and communicative competence in different educational contexts. If these recommendations are followed, teachers will be able to create more engaging, learner-centered and communicative

foreign language classrooms that better prepare students to use the language in real life communication and professional interaction in a globalized world.

CONCLUSION

Theatrical language activities are a very effective and innovative way of teaching a foreign language. The method integrates literature, communication, creativity and collaboration to make language learning active and meaningful.

Performance-based learning places a greater emphasis on learner participation and authentic communication, rather than the more traditional teacher-centered approaches that focus on memorization and written examinations. Students learn communication skills essential for real-world interaction through dramatization, storytelling, poetry performance and collaborative interpretation.

The project done at Hanoi Law University shows that the performance-based literary activities strongly boost speaking fluency, pronunciation, listening skills, motivation, confidence, creativity, collaboration and critical thinking. The approach is also in line with Communicative Language Teaching and Social Constructivist theories which focus on authentic communication and social interaction.

Despite the cultural and institutional challenges, supportive teaching practices and gradual implementation can assist students in adapting to communicative and learner-centered learning environments successfully. Teachers, institutions and curriculum designers need to acknowledge the benefits of performance-based learning and provide the support to implement it.

In the end, the on-stage performance-based literary activities provide more than language development. They are preparing students to be confident communicators, creative thinkers, collaborative learners, and active members of a global society. Modern education continues to evolve and performance-based learning offers a powerful path to meaningful and practical foreign language education.

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