

UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MARA

**INTERACTIVE ROLES IN A
VIRTUAL DRAMA CLASSROOM IN
A MALAYSIAN HIGHER
EDUCATION INSTITUTION: THE
SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIVIST AND
VISIBLE THINKING APPROACH**

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ABSTRACT

The evolving educational landscape has seen a significant shift from traditional, teacher-centred approaches to learner-centred pedagogies, reflecting the principles of constructivism that view learning as an active, social process. In line with this, the Malaysian Education Blueprint (2013-2025) emphasises developing autonomous, critical, and creative learners, equipped for 21st-century challenges. However, despite these policy directions, there remains a gap in understanding the interactive roles within drama classrooms, particularly in virtual settings, where maintaining meaningful student engagement and collaboration can be challenging. This study addresses this gap by investigating the interactive roles of students and lecturers in the drama classroom, focusing on the impact of virtual interactions and the applicability of Vygotsky's Social Constructivist Theory (SCT) and Ritchhart's Visible Thinking (VT) approach. Adopting a qualitative case study design, this research gathered data through focus group discussions, semi-structured interviews, and classroom observations involving 19 undergraduates and three lecturers of a drama course in a Malaysian public university. Students were divided into experimental and control groups to explore the impact of applying VT routines with and without explicit instructions. The findings revealed that structured thinking routines like the Ladder of Feedback (LoF) and Think-Pair-Share (TPS) significantly enhanced interactive roles of both students and lecturers, categorised into Engagement and Key Attributes. These routines promoted clarity, cohesion, critical thinking, and metacognitive awareness, aligning closely with SCT principles. However, the findings also highlighted challenges, including connectivity, technical constraints, and varied student engagement, especially in the control groups, where the absence of explicit LoF application led to less structured, less cohesive interactions. Despite these challenges, the study demonstrated the feasibility and effectiveness of integrating SCT and VT routines in the Malaysian tertiary drama classroom, promoting a more interactive and student-centred learning environment. These findings contribute to the growing body of research on drama education, offering insights into the practical application of SCT and VT in developing critical, creative, and collaborative learners. The study also provides valuable recommendations for curriculum design, suggesting that a more structured approach to integrating VT routines can enhance drama pedagogy in both online and physical settings, supporting the goals of the Malaysian Education Blueprint and broader educational reforms.

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“Wisdom is not a product of schooling, but of the lifelong attempt to acquire it”

- Albert Einstein

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research Background

This study was driven by the conception that using drama as a tool in the language classroom allows for enhanced interactions and thinking, aligning with the social constructivist theory (SCT) and Visible Thinking (VT) approach to education. Underpinned by Lev Vygotsky's SCT and Ron Ritchhart's VT approach from Harvard University's Project Zero (PZ), interactive roles became the focal elements observed and discussed in this study. Teaching and learning are inherently social processes that occur through interactions (Vygotsky, 1962, 1978). Similarly, VT, founded by Ritchhart (2006), also advocates collaborative interactions in its approach. It promotes making the thinking process visible and encourages conscious thinking routines among learners, which are generally lacking in current classroom practice.

Historically, drama and theatre have been compelling in both learning and indoctrination. Tolstoy (1861), as cited in Nessel (1997), envisioned future schools as theatres, libraries, or conversation hubs rather than traditional classrooms. Philosophers like Plato and Aristotle also acknowledged drama as an educational tool, distinguishing between performance for learning and acting for entertainment (McCaslin, 2006). Water (2021) supports this dual role of drama, citing recent neuroscientific studies that show its effectiveness in educating the whole child, whether taught as a discipline or teaching technique. Drama can also engage students not reached by traditional methods, transform the learning environment, and challenge even successful students (Water, 2021). Literature on drama education continues to support the significance of interactions, with Bsharat (2017) emphasising that drama requires meaningful interactions, highlighting the importance of communication and concentration for learners. Ustuk and Inan (2017) conducted a comparative literature review on the impacts of drama in teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL), categorising international studies into constructivist effects, cultural effects, effects on performance in the target language, and effects on the affective states of EFL learners. The potential benefits of drama in the language classroom are vast, and this study aims to explore further and validate these benefits.