

## VISUALIZING CREATIVITY: LEARNERS' PERSPECTIVE ON LIBERTY IN WRITING AND PERFORMING PLAYS FOR COURSE PROJECT/PRESENTATION

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### **Abstract**

*This article scrutinizes the opinion and impact of stage/drama performances on students of undergraduate program; having the liberty to write and perform their own one act plays after understanding different techniques to incorporate in dramas. Students of BS English were assigned to visualize their perceptions as part of their sessional presentation. A questionnaire is given to students to get their views afterwards. The data shows 85% students vote in the favor of this technique as it allows them to comprehend and grasp the ideas and techniques more effectively. Likert scale reflects the higher rate in the support of comfort and hand on experience while enhancing their skills. Open ended questions highlight the challenges to face such as teamwork, collaboration, individuality and scarce resources. In the light of Vygotsky's constructivism, Gardner's multiple intelligences and Dewey's experiential learning, this research aims to highlight impact of performance based learning in higher education. This study suggests that today's vigorous academic settings could be revolutionized.*

**Key Words:** learners, drama, presentation, liberty

### **Introduction**

The student body in this era of AI cannot be guided in the same traditional way of relying on memorization, cramming and pre-defined test papers. It is the need of the hour to kick them towards creativity by inculcating critical thinking and having them personally involved instead of just let them be the passive learners. Asking them to write and perform their own dramas, for project or presentation, is a distinctive way of giving them the lead. It gives them the opportunity to actively showcase their understanding instead of just absorbing information meekly. Does this method empowered the learners or make learning challenging is what we will try to bring out in this study? The focus will be on finding out how students see this method, whether it gives them creative freedom to uplift learning through theatrical performances or become a challenge for them to come out of their shells.

It is not unconventional or something novel to empower learners. In early 20<sup>th</sup> century John Dewey clearly proves that real education takes place through hand on experiences and not from sidelines. Writing and staging a play gives them a freedom to alter and modify great plays in hand or come up with entirely new idea along with the liberty to decide genres, scene, costumes, message, characters and theme without any external intervention of instructor. This type of creative and strategic assignment or presentation by becoming a part of course planning and class activity comes in direct contrast with the old school of thoughts.

This study will zero in on the feedback of learners who have been assigned to write and perform their own drama. Traditionally it is an instructor who designs theory based activities to work on but learners are the ones who can actually tell about the sustainability of the activities or if there is room for changings in them. The data collected for this study is taken from undergrad students of BS English, in a private university, where drama is offered as a subject in their course. The gathered results are worth discussing with interesting details. The learners reveal their personal approach towards performance and the takeaway in the long run. It unfolds their strong acceptance towards the freedom and motivation though issues of handling time and schedule cannot be denied. Moreover, stage fright is another hurdle for learners to overcome.

### **Literature Review**

Integration of dramatic performances into traditional classrooms aligns with various well-structured educational theories. Pivoting around Lev Vygotsky's (1978) constructive paradigm that states true learning is possible only through interaction, collaboration and active participation. Creativity marks the foundation of performances where learners build upon through rehearsal, interpretation and presentation while following given instructions. This falls in line with Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development where guided and controlled liberty gives learners a freedom to grow beyond their current capability.

John Dewey's (1916) philosophy strengthen this approach. In his book *Democracy and Education*, Dewey stresses that education should be an active hand on experience just like artistic formation. Performing a drama as class assignment provides the opportunity to bring into life the dull and symmetrical black and white characters. It helps to portray the genuine feelings and emotions leading to a richer understanding which is also supported by the National Endowment for Arts, that clearly states, a blended curriculum of practical art and theory boosts up memory retention by 30%.

Creativity, in performing dramas, helps in dealing with limitations of traditional way of evaluating the learners. Essays are good to mark writing skills but they fail to grasp feelings, emotions and understanding of characters. Boal's (1979) radical concept, in *Theater of the Oppressed*, stresses that through performances learners practice real life scenarios like identity and justice in society. They have on hand experience of practical life they will eventually lead beyond the safe walls of institutions. The liberty, to present freely, fosters innovation, learners recreate the legendry characters and associate them with today's world they are living in. This helps them to feel confident by bridging the past with the present.

Empirical researches also support the importance of performances. The *Journal of Aesthetic Education* (2020) presents a review based on 25 studies on performance based learning to conclude that performance leads to empathy, critical thinking and cooperation among learners. With freedom comes responsibility. It falls on instructors to keep a close check on learners, in case of absolute liberty problems like marginalization or discrimination arises. Introvert learners or new to performances may feel insecure or out of the place. Gardner's theory (2015) of multiple intelligence states, performances may enhance social skill and bodily-kinesthetic but it needs monitoring for all to adjust.

In andragogic set up this method is becoming popular. Many well-known universities in the modern world have started incorporating performances into their theoretical courses only to notice a comparatively higher involvement of learners gradually. Still there is room for more research

especially on the learners of developing countries. It is still to be known how they will handle liberty. Will they feel confident or stressed?

Csikszentmihalyi (1990) states in his book 'Flow' that challenges and independence provide the base for creativity to flourish and grow. Performing plays/dramas creates a good opportunity for learners to immerse themselves in the realm of creation by losing self-consciousness so they can visualize something new. Hindrances like low institutional budget or large classes are inevitable so it is important to know learners' issues and grievances for long term developmental goal.

The significance of dramatic activities in education is also highlighted by Dorothy Heathcote. The idea of 'Mantle of the Expert' presented by Heathcote and Bolton (1995) depicts learners as experts within the framework of fictional world, where they are independent to solve and interpret problems and situations. This approach works on developing sense of leadership, ownership and learning by promoting critical thinking. The learners take the role of dramatic setting beyond the fictional world into reality which will reflect in their skills and logical reasoning.

'Process Drama' is another step in the favor of drama-based learning put forward by Cecily O'Neill and Shin-Mei Kao (1998). The focus of this idea basically revolves around the journey of learning while preparing for the final performance. This approach encourages learners to indulge into exploring complex emotions and ideas while collaborating with their fellows. It is a meaningful interaction within the frame of performing arts developing visionary power and empathy. It is also responsible for boosting cognition and emotions of learners through practical engagement.

Many research oriented studies reveal the abundant benefits of drama-based learning in academia. Esat Yildirim's meta-analysis (2022) is one of them, strongly advocating the positive impacts of practical methods and approaches in academic learning for theory based subjects as compare to the conventional ways of learning. His study also shows the gradual change in learners' behavior towards learning, which advocates the importance of activities in achieving value based outcomes in learning.

Jonathan Neelands (2009) emphasis that by actively participating in drama, learners meaningfully construct a democratic environment where they have opportunities to negotiate roles, analyze story and cooperate with fellows to come up with well-structured and organized performances. Performances create the chances to talk, reflect on and discuss dialogues, which lead to critical thinking, mutual understanding and empathy. By providing the freedom to communicate, drama-based learning arranges the platform for self-awareness, team-work, decision-making and synergy. The significance of drama-based andragogy in learning language and developing communication skills cannot be denied. According to Maley and Duff (2005) drama performance is a good way to give an authentic context by offering different techniques, including role-play, improvisation, tableaux, hot seating and pantomime. By performing, learners have the chance to practice language through interaction and collaboration as compare to some fabricated targeted learning. This helps in boosting confidence that ultimately leads to fluency and language proficiency.

Similarly, Alasmari, N., & Alshae'el, A. (2020) also advocate the importance of drama in enhancing communication skills and confidence level. They stress that drama performances in classrooms and especially in language learning classrooms motivate learners to participate by inspiring them. While performing different roles, learners have the opportunity to interact with fellows which helps them in learning language comfortably and sharing their experiences pleasantly.

The revolutionary properties of practical arts are undeniable as emphasized by Maxine Greene (1995). He stresses that under the umbrella of performing arts learners find a way to realize their imagination and see realities in another light. It is an approach that enables the learners to view real life situations critically and develop their own point of view regarding society, norms and culture. It also plays its role in intellectual growth, cognitive and ethical maturity of the learners by giving them opportunities to experience the real practical life outside the institutions.

### **Methodology**

A carefully designed questionnaire is used to get in-depth views of learners of undergrad students of BS English, in a private university in Lahore, taking course of drama as their major. The questionnaire titled “Learners’ Perspective on Liberty in Writing and Performing Plays for Course Project/Presentation” is solved by learners after performing drama. The questionnaire is designed in a way to keep things concise, straightforward, respecting privacy and strictly follows confidentiality. It includes variety of questions, open and close ended, to get relevant, accurate and reliable data.

The questionnaire has four sections: the first one deals with their personal information, second one uses Likert scale to know about their experience, third one is related to their opinion on apparent advantage or disadvantage through rating scale and open ended questions, and the last one deals with the comparison and areas for improvement. It is disseminated through Google Forms shortly after learners’ performance in spring 2025 session. The group consist of only female students performing varied characters created by their own innovative minds. To get numeric data SPSS is used and for open ended questions NVivo is selected.

### **Limitations**

As the research relies on questionnaire, there are chances of biasedness, overrated/overstated reviews. Furthermore, the study takes into account the opinion of BS students from one university, though the outcomes could be generalized with exact setup. Lastly, this study accounts the views of only female learners. On the whole, this article presents genuine picture of learners’ opinions based on empirical findings.

### **Findings**

The research surfaced plentiful information, bringing into light the role of freedom and creativity in the development of learners through staging drama. Enthusiasm of learners could be clearly observed by close ended questions whereas open ended questions highlight multiple layers of understanding and perception.

### **Experience**

The main questions show impactful marks with the average of 4.3 on Likert Scale. The answers to question 2 about their freedom to select genre and theme of their own to write a story are especially noticeable. One participant reviews “It is a feeling of different level imagining to stand with great writers.” Another one states “It felt great to own a story instead of borrowing it.” The more or less same type of opinion ranked up to 81% of the total participants. In the same way answering to question 4 averaged 4.4, participants say freedom of creativity make presentations more lively as compare to traditional ways. Answering about enhancing their understanding question 5, mostly agrees with it making it 70% of total participants.

An average of 4.5, question 6, suggests that there is a lot of work to handle while preparing performance and there are always areas for development.

### **Advantages**

Participants take the liberty to answer freely about what they like the most an open ended question in the questionnaire. The varied answers show an average of 50% stressing innovation, 32% cooperation and 18% involvement with audience. A participant reflects “It’s magical to improvise my dialogues according to my culture.” Question 9 dealing with skill development is a big win-win hitting a rate of 4.5 feeling confident in front of audience and 69% are comfortable in cooperating with others. Participants find out a huge gap in characterization between reading and performing: “To portray emotions is difficult to deal with.”

### **Challenges**

Freedom comes at a price, with no one to urge, push or monitor most of the participants face problems like time management 56%, collaboration 30% and procrastination 14%. A participant states: “It took us ages to agree on the theme.” More or less 70% feel anxious to perform in front of audience: “We were not sure if the theme and dialogues we wrote align.” Some participants talk about uneven contributions of group members 26%, resulting delays. Another concern is pointed out regarding resource disparities 23% lowering the morale.

### **Comparison**

Dealing with the question 11 asking to compare these kinds of assignment with the traditional ones, most of the participants 56% vote in the favor of its effectiveness, 29% are not so sure. Less than 10% find it ineffective: “It’s time consuming and demands a lot of energy.” Answering question 12 if they are in support of such assignment in future, 74% (majority) affirm, and 32% (anxious) say no to it.

The question 13 about future suggestions show a number of things: rubric 52%, funds for props 40% and some participants suggest to organize training sessions.

The findings reveal that though freedom begets creativity but it still needs a framework to hold on. The responses of those participants who often indulge in these type of activities show more positivity which ultimately reflects the importance of organizing such activities.

### **Discussion**

The outcomes of this survey highlights the importance of practical learning align with theoretical framework, paving the way for future educators by providing a real-world roadmap. The responses for motivation clearly falls in line with Dewey’s learner-centered approach where liberty to perform has its own deep rooted perks.

Skill development is one of the biggest advantages. An average of 4.5 in skill development points out how performances are helping in enhancing soft skill mandatory for employability. A LinkedIn analysis shows 92% professionals consider soft skills more important than hard skills when it comes to hiring. Howard Gardner’s theory of multiple intelligence indulge learners to gain kinesthetic insight through practical learning. According to American Psychological Association Gen Z shows highest average stress level which could be clearly seen in response of anxiety level (40%) in front of audience. This reflects the significance of both freedom and coaching.

Equity also needs immediate attention. Disparities of resources question 9 shows privileged learners have more chances to flourish as also proved by Pierre Bourdieu’s in “The Forms of Capital”.

In comparison, practical performances exceed, in terms of outcome, far better than theoretical studies as proved by question 11. As per the revelation of Innovative Higher Education, satisfaction level of innovative art classes increases by 25%.

It is clear that instructors could use controlled freedom to guide learners without manipulating them. By taking one step at a time under guidance will help them to grow both mentally and physically. The results could be seen in their personality development and level of confidence in social interaction. This guided liberty is the key to revitalizing education in this modern era.

### Conclusion

To sum up, it is proved that transformative andragogy is the only way to lead learners freely. The highest rating for enthusiasm (81%), understanding (70%), and skill development (78%) reflects the importance of practical performances in bringing into life the dead beat conventional classrooms. Challenges like anxiety and scarce resources are inevitable but careful planning could help to tackle the hurdles as supported by the demand of trainings and support.

It is a good way to up lift education on one hand and enhance learning on the other by putting diversity to practical use mimicking real life scenarios. However, instructors must perform their role wisely in supporting, providing assistance and flexibility in assessment. In this era, when education keeps on moving between physical and online mode, it falls on the part of instructors to revolutionized their ways to give learners a vent for not only fostering knowledge but also for expression.

Let's work to open the gate way to success by developing curricula to empower, motivate an inspire the learners.

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