

Exploring students' engagement in dramatizing proverbs: A study on collaboration, creativity, and communication

ABSTRACT - Despite the widespread recognition of drama-based activities as a pedagogical mechanism for promoting interactive language learning, empirical research examining student engagement in the dramatization of proverbs within English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context remains comparatively limited. This study investigates the nature of student engagement among sixth-semester English Language Education majors during proverb dramatization activities, with particular focus on three dimensions: collaboration, creativity, and communication. A qualitative-dominant mixed-methods design was employed to examine the factors influencing student engagement throughout the activity. Participants consisted of 31 students enrolled in a drama course. Data were collected through classroom observations, questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. Qualitative data were subjected to thematic analysis, while questionnaire responses were evaluated using descriptive statistics to complement and substantiate the qualitative findings. The results indicate that students demonstrated a high level of engagement across all three dimensions. With respect to collaboration, student engagement was strongly manifested in team-based cooperation and mutual support throughout the process of proverb dramatization. Regarding creativity, engagement was reflected in the development of contextually relevant scenarios and the use of symbolic interpretations of proverbs within student performances. Engagement in communication was evident through both verbal and non-verbal expressions, including pronunciation, intonation, gestures, and facial expressions. Furthermore, student engagement was influenced by a range of engagement enablers, such as peer support, personal motivation, and opportunities for creative expression, as well as several challenges, including time constraints, group coordination difficulties, and challenges related to idea development.

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1. Introduction

Drama-based learning has increasingly been recognized as an effective pedagogical approach in language education because it allows learners to utilize language in authentic, contextualized, and creative ways. Rather than considering language as an abstract system of rules, drama contextualizes learning within intentional interaction and embodied experience. Prior studies have highlighted its contribution to students' participation, motivation, communication abilities, and critical thinking skill (Dodson, 2002; Horwitz et al., 1994; Hu & Shu, 2025; Maley et al., 2009; O'Gara, 2008). In English language teaching contexts, drama-based instruction has been shown to enhance linguistic skills such as speaking, reading, and pronunciation (Astiandani & Mustofa, 2021; Hua et al., 2025; Rose et al., 2000), while simultaneously fostering creativity, empathy, and intercultural awareness. These qualities establish drama not only as a supplementary classroom activity but as a comprehensive approach for developing socially responsive and competent language users.

Among the various drama techniques used in language classrooms such as tableaux, mime, and role-play (Maley et al., 2009), this study focuses on dramatizing proverbs. In dramatizing proverb activity, students interpret the figurative meaning of proverbs and transform them into short performances. Proverbs, as succinct embodiments of cultural knowledge, contain metaphorical and moral meanings that require interpretation beyond literal comprehension. When students dramatize proverbs, they must interpret meaning, construct relatable scenarios, and translate abstract ideas into visible actions and dialogue. This process integrates linguistic understanding with performance-based learning, encouraging learners to engage with language cognitively, socially, and creatively.

Dramatization has been associated with improved pronunciation, communicative competence, and learner motivation in foreign language classrooms (Khidirova & Nashirova, 2021; Kuimova & Polyushko, 2015; Ly, 2024). It offers a scaffolded environment in which students collaborate, experiment with language, and inhabit different roles. Such activities can enhance learners' interpretative skills, especially when dealing with figurative expressions such as metaphors and idioms found in proverbs (Cooper, 2011). For pre-service English teachers enrolled in a drama course, dramatizing proverbs may provide additional pedagogical value. In addition to language practice, it offers opportunities to develop classroom management skills, creative instructional strategies, and sensitivity to cultural nuance. Those competencies are essential for future educators (Mammadova, 2024).

Although the benefits of drama-based learning are well documented, limited attention has been given to how students engage in dramatizing proverbs and what factors influence that engagement. Current studies tend to focus on language outcomes, while the dynamic processes of collaboration, creativity, and communication during performance-based activities remain underexplored, particularly in pre-service teacher education contexts. Understanding how students participate, negotiate meaning, and respond to challenges during dramatization can provide deeper insight into the nature of engagement in drama-based language learning. Therefore, this study aims to explore students' engagement in dramatizing proverbs within a drama course for pre-service English teachers. Specifically, it investigates how students

demonstrate collaboration, creativity, and communication during the activity and identifies the factors that influence their engagement. The study is guided by the following research questions:

1. How do students engage in dramatizing proverbs in terms of collaboration, creativity, and communication?
2. What factors influence students' engagement in this drama-based learning activity?

2. Literature review

2.1. Drama in language learning

Drama-based pedagogy has gained increasing attention as an experiential approach to language learning, grounded in the view that language is best acquired through meaningful use in social interaction rather than through isolated drills. Recent research highlights drama as a dynamic instructional medium that situates learners in authentic communicative contexts where they can practice language through role play, improvisation, and narrative performance. These activities enable learners to negotiate meaning, adapt language to novel situations and engage with linguistics forms in context, which has been shown to foster fluency, vocabulary acquisition, and learner confidence in expressive tasks. For example, research from Pratolo (2025) and Agustini (2025) showed that drama contributed to measurable gains in students' English-speaking confidence. Furthermore, in his study, Pratolo (2025) also reported that the students had clearer speech, greater fluency, improved pronunciation and broader vocabulary as they moved through the performance cycles.

2.2. The role of proverbs in language learning

Proverb is defined as a short, generally known sentence of the folk which contains wisdom, truth, morals, and traditional views in a metaphorical, fixed, and memorizable form (Mieder, 2004). While Mieder (2004) emphasized the communal origin of proverb, Mammadova (2024) highlights the value of proverbs in developing learners' semantic awareness, inferencing skills and intercultural competence by defining proverbs as concise linguistics unit that convey culturally embedded meanings and promote cognitive processing through metaphorical interpretation. Moreover, in an educational setting, proverbs are often defined as authentic language resources that support communicative and cultural learning. According to Boykhanov (2025) proverbs function as instructional materials that foster critical thinking and learner engagement by encouraging students to interpret implicit meanings and relate them to real-life experiences. This definition aligns proverbs closely with communicative language teaching principle.

Proverbs play significant roles in language acquisition. According to mammadova (2024) proverbs play multifaceted roles in language learning by enhancing cognitive engagement, supporting vocabulary acquisition, transmitting cultural knowledge, developing pragmatics competence, and serving as effective pedagogical tools in ESL/EFL contexts. Through their metaphorical richness and cultural depth, proverbs bridge linguistic and cultural learning, contributing to more holistic and meaningful language acquisition. Similarly, in his study Huu (2025) revealed that proverbs enhance both linguistic competence and sociolinguistic (cultural)

competence. As effective linguistic resources for developing core language skills, proverbs support vocabulary acquisition through their metaphorical, rhythmic, and tonal structures. On the other hand, as carriers of cultural values and social norms, proverbs encode cultural expectations related to behavior, ethics, and world view, such as diligence, morality, and social responsibility.

2.3. Students' engagement in drama-based learning

Student engagement is commonly conceptualized as a multidimensional construct consisting of behavior, emotional, and cognitive components (Fredricks et al., 2004). Behavioral engagement refers to observable participation, effort, and persistence in learning tasks. Emotional engagement involves affective responses such as interest, enjoyment, or anxiety toward academic activities. Cognitive engagement reflects the degree of psychological investment and strategic effort students devote to understand complex material.

Although these dimensions provide a useful theoretical framework, they remain broad conceptual categories. In classroom practice, particularly within a performance-based learning environment, engagement often manifests through interactive processes such as collaborative negotiation, creative interpretation, and communicative expression. Drama-based learning offers a context in which engagement becomes visible not only through individual effort but also through collective meaning-making and expressive performance.

Consequently, examining engagement solely through its traditional theoretical dimensions may overlook the pedagogical mechanisms through which it emerges in practice. A more situated analysis is therefore required to capture how engagement operates within specific instructional activities such as dramatizing proverbs.

2.4. Collaboration, creativity, and communication in drama-based learning

Collaboration is a fundamental element of drama-based learning, as dramatic tasks inherently require learners to work collectively to interpret text, negotiate meaning, and coordinate actions during performance. Collaborative learning encourages students to exchange ideas, assume shared responsibility, and engage in joint-problem solving, which contributes to increased behavioral and emotional engagement (Johnson & Johnson, 2016; Stinson & Winston, 2011). In drama activities involving proverb interpretation, collaboration supports collective meaning-making, allowing learners to explore multiple perspectives embedded in metaphorical and culturally rich texts. From a sociocultural standpoint, collaborative interaction enables learners to scaffold one another's understanding through dialogue and shared experience, reinforcing learning as a socially mediated process (Vygotsky, 1978). Previous research in drama and language education indicates that collaborative dramatic activities create interactive learning environments in which students are more willing to participate, take risks, and sustain involvement in meaning-focused language use (Kao & O'neill, 1998; Stinson, 2009).

Creativity and communication are intertwined in drama-based learning and play a crucial role in fostering cognitive and emotional engagement. Creativity in education is commonly defined as the ability to generate ideas that are both novel and appropriate to the learning context

(Craft, 2005). When students dramatize proverbs, they engage in creative interpretation by transforming abstract moral messages into concrete narratives, dialogues, and actions, which requires higher-order thinking such as inference, symbolic reasoning, and conceptual integration (Sawyer, 2012) Drama also provides an authentic communicative environment in which learners use language purposefully to convey meaning through verbal and non-verbal mode, including speech, intonation, gesture, and movement (Kao & O’neill, 1998) Such communicative interaction has been shown to enhance learners’ fluency, confidence, and pragmatic competence, particularly in EFL setting where opportunities for meaningful communication are often limited (Stinson, 2009). Through the integration of creativity and communication, drama-based learning enables students to engage deeply with language as both a cognitive and expressive resource.

3. Method

3.1. Research design

This study employed a qualitative-dominant mixed-methods design to explore students’ engagement in dramatizing proverbs. Qualitative data from observations, reflections, interviews, and document analysis constituted the primary source of interpretation, while quantitative data from Likert-scale questionnaires were used descriptively to support and triangulate emerging themes. This design allowed for a comprehensive examination of engagement as both an observable process and a perceived experience.

3.2. Participant

The participants of this study are 31 sixth-semester students majoring in the English language education study program who were taking a drama course. These students were selected using purposive sampling, as they have prior experience with drama-based learning, making them suitable subjects for exploring engagement in dramatizing proverbs. Their participation in this course provided a relevant context to examine how they engage in terms of collaboration, creativity, and communication.

3.3. Instrument of the research

To obtain a comprehensive understanding of students’ engagement in drama-based learning, this study employed multiple instruments, including observation, questionnaires, interviews, and document analysis. The use of multiple instruments allowed the researcher to capture observable behaviors, students’ perceptions, collaborative processes, and creative outputs.

First, observation checklists and field notes were used to document real-time behavioral engagement, including participation patterns, peer interaction, role negotiation, and communicative performance. While the checklist provided structured indicators aligned with collaboration, creativity, and communication, field notes allowed for richer contextual descriptions of classroom dynamics and emerging influences on engagement.

Second, a questionnaire consisting of closed and open-ended items was administered to capture students’ perceptions of their own engagement. The likert-scale items generated

measurable self-report data on participation, confidence, idea-sharing, and collaborative contribution, while open-ended responses allowed students to articulate personal experiences, challenges, and reflections in their own words. The validity of the closed-ended items was examined using item-total correlation (Pearson product-moment), with all items demonstrating significant correlations ($p < .05$). Internal consistency was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha ($\alpha = .896$) indicating high reliability.

Third, semi-structured interviews were conducted to provide deeper insight into individual experiences that could not be fully captured through questionnaires. The interviews enabled exploration of students' reasoning processes, emotional responses, and interpretations of collaborative and creative challenges.

Finally, document analysis was utilized to examine the various written materials such as drama scripts, students' reflection journal, performance notes, and written feedback from lecturer and peers. These documents helped in identifying patterns in students' collaborative effort, creative approaches and communication skills. Document analysis helped triangulate data collected from questionnaires and interviews, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of how students engage with drama-based learning.

The integration of these instruments enabled methodological triangulation, ensuring a more comprehensive and credible account of student engagement in dramatizing proverbs.

3.4. Data analysis technique

In analyzing these data, thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2012) was used. The analysis followed 6 steps: familiarization, initial coding, generating themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. To ensure trustworthiness of the study, the criteria of credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability (Cohen et al., 2018) were applied. Credibility was established through triangulation of data source and instrument. In ensuring dependability, a clear audit trail was maintained by documenting coding decisions and theme development. Confirmability was enhanced by grounding all interpretations in participant data. Direct quotes, observation notes, and group reflections were used as supporting evidence for each theme. Finally, the transferability was addressed by providing thick, rich, description of participant, context, and learning task (proverb dramatization). The application of this trustworthiness principle helped in reinforcing the validity of this study.

4. Findings

4.1. Students' engagement in dramatizing proverbs

To answer the first research question (QR 1): "How do students engage in dramatizing proverbs in terms of collaboration, creativity, and communication?" This section presents findings based on the thematic analysis of students' responses, observation, and reflections. The data reveal patterns of student engagement in drama-based activity across three core dimensions: collaboration, creativity, and communication. Each theme is discussed with supporting evidence from questionnaires, open-ended responses, observation checklist, and individual and group reflections.

4.1.1. Collaboration

Students' engagement was strongly reflected in their teamwork and mutual support throughout the process of proverb dramatization. It was reflected in a Likert-scale questionnaire.

Table 1

Students' collaboration.

No.	Statements	1	2	3	4	5
1.	My group worked well together and respected each other's ideas.	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	24.2%	75.8%
2.	Everyone contributed equally to the performance.	0.0%	3.2%	3.2%	38.7%	54.8%
3.	We helped each other when someone struggled with their lines or performance.	0.0%	0.0%	3.3%	33.3%	63.3%
4.	The rehearsal process improved our teamwork and problem-solving skills.	0.0%	0.0%	9.7%	35.5%	54.8%
5.	I felt comfortable expressing my ideas to the group	0.0%	0.0%	16.7%	10.0%	73.3%

(Scale 1 = strongly Disagree, Scale 5 Strongly Agree)

As shown in table 1, the students experienced a high degree of collaboration during activity of dramatizing the proverbs. Nearly all respondents agreed that their group worked well together and respected each other's ideas which indicated a strong sense of mutual respect and cooperation. Additionally, the majority of the students gave positive responses for the other statements indicating that they felt a fair distribution of roles and responsibilities within their group and felt comfortable in sharing their ideas to the group. Moreover, they supported one another, especially when challenges arose during rehearsals or performances, indicating positive group dynamics. This mutual support and shared problem solving align with Vygotsky's (1978) social constructivist theory which emphasizes that learning occurs through social interaction and scaffolding among peers.

The students also demonstrated active collaboration throughout the dramatization process, particularly during the early planning and rehearsal stages. It was revealed from the classroom observation data that all 6 groups demonstrated equal task distribution which was proven by the contribution of each member in script development and distribution of roles.

All the six groups showed equal contribution, joint-decision making, visible peer support which supported the data from table 1 claiming that the students had a high level of engagement in terms of collaboration. The sample of this strong collaboration could be seen in group 1 which demonstrated equal contribution by sharing tasks and participating equally in the performance. Each student had a specific role and was involved in script writing. They chose the proverb together, decided the roles of each member, aligned their ideas into coherent storyline, and discussed how the story would be executed. Those actions showed evidence of joint-decision making, which aligns with previous research indicating that students' engagement in

collaborative practices substantially enhances their ability to analyze issues from multiple perspectives and strengthens their problem-solving skills (Hu & Shu, 2025).

Active collaboration during the activity of dramatization was confirmed by students' responses in an open-ended questionnaire. They value their group work such as respecting opinion, patience, flexibility and active learning, and combining ideas into unified versions. Some of the responses from the students can be seen in table 2.

Table 2

Students' responses on proverb dramatization activity.

Code	Statements
Sharing Ideas and Respecting Opinion	
S30	Through collaboration, we could support each other – when one person was weak in one area, others helped so the performance went smoothly.
Patience, Flexibility, and Active Listening	
S24	It was important to respect each other's ideas and work together to create something better.
Combining Ideas into a Unified Vision	
S2	We had to understand each other within the group, especially when combining one idea with many perspectives.

Based on the students' reflection in table 2 the students engaged in terms of collaboration through several observable behaviors. The first behavior was sharing ideas and respecting opinions. The students contributed and combined diverse ideas into a unified performance. They feel more involved when they are heard and respected, leading to mutual understanding. The collaborative energy within the group created a constructive learning atmosphere in which students expanded one another's ideas to enhance their shared work (Ramli et al., 2021). Such cycles of generating and revising ideas reflect the nature of genuine learning experiences, where learners tackle tasks that mirror real-world situations and work toward producing meaningful results (Ramli et al., 2021). The second behavior was willingness to be patient, be flexible, and be active listeners. They not only showed willingness to listen to one another but also maintained patience during decision making. When the decision made was not in accordance with the will of one of the members, they could be very flexible. The third behavior was combining ideas into a unified version. They combined different perspectives, ideas, and suggestions into a unified storyline. This ideas combination process required some skills such as negotiation, mutual respect, and creative compromise. This active participation showed a high level of engagement during dramatizing proverbs.

Taken together, the convergence of quantitative agreement, observational evidence, and reflective accounts demonstrates that collaboration was enacted through shared decision making, mutual scaffolding, and negotiated creativity. The dramatization task required students to collectively transform abstract proverbs into staged narratives, positioning interaction not merely as support for learning but as the central mechanism through which meaning was constructed.

4.1.2. Creativity

Students’ engagement was also reflected in how the students approach the creative challenge of interpreting the proverbs. Each group had freedom in choosing the well-known proverb that had moral lessons to be acted out in their short drama. They had to be able to illustrate the meaning of a chosen proverb through storytelling and character interaction.

In dramatizing the proverb, the students not only chose the proverb by themselves but also created the story that demonstrated the meaning of the proverbs. In doing this their story had to include the characters who faced conflict or challenge, a situation where the proverb’s meaning became clear, and resolution highlighting the lesson of the proverb. Then, after creating the story, they made a script by preparing dialogues and actions that clearly express the story. Those activities encouraged the students to be more active. It can be seen from the students’ response for the statements below.

Table 3
Students’ creativity.

No.	Statements	1	2	3	4	5
1.	The activity encouraged me to think creatively in interpreting the proverb.	0%	0%	16.13%	9.68%	70.97%
2.	Our group came up with a unique way to present the meaning of the proverb.	0%	6.45%	22.58%	35.48%	35.8%
3.	I felt free to express my creativity in acting, scriptwriting, or staging.	0%	0%	22.58%	45.16%	32.26%
4.	Watching other groups’ performances inspired new creative ideas for me.	0%	0%	16.13%	35.48%	48.39%

(Scale 1 = strongly Disagree, Scale 5 = strongly Agree)

Based on table 3, the students had strong engagement in creativity during the activity of proverb dramatization. Numerous students stated that the activity encouraged them to think creatively in interpreting the meaning of proverbs. The students were even allowed to reflect their understanding into something unique and beyond literal interpretation. The proverb did not have to be said verbally but can also be interpreted through the action and rich scenario. These responses suggest that students experienced the task not merely as performance reproduction but as active creative construction.

Document analysis supported this finding. Across groups, students transformed abstract moral statements into narrative scenarios grounded in contemporary contexts. For example, group 5 reinterpreted “A Monkey in Silk is Still a Monkey” through the portrayal of a social media influencer whose polished online identity concealed unethical behavior. This adaptation required students to recombine traditional proverbial meaning with contemporary digital culture, producing a narrative configuration that was new within their experiential background.

The finding aligns with Keith Sawyer’s (Sawyer, 2012) individualist definition of creativity as a “new mental combination that is expressed in the world.” The students did not

invent entirely new proverbs. They generated novel combinations of familiar elements such as moral lessons, modern social realities, character conflict, dialogue, gesture, and staging. Creativity here operated at the level of “little-c” emerging through the recombination of previously learned knowledge into new expressive forms. Importantly, these combinations were externalized through performance, satisfying Sawyer’s requirement that creativity must be observable and socially expressed.

Table 4

Summary of creative narrative construction across groups.

Group	Proverb	Narrative Context	Types of Creative Combination (Sawyer, 2012)
1	Rome wasn't built in a Day	Group Academic project	Recombination of perseverance and teamwork narrative
2	Practice Makes Perfect	Cooking competition	Skill development mapped to performance struggle
3	One Step at a Time	Students' anxiety over deadlines	Psychological struggle externalized as staged conflict
4	Water can Carve through Stone	Academic persistence	Abstract persistence mapped to teacher-student dialogue
5	A Monkey in Silk is Still a Monkey	Social media influencer culture	Moral hypocrisy reframed through digital persona
6	Don't Bite the Hand that Feeds You	School friendship conflict	Gratitude and betrayal enacted through reconciliation plot

Second, students engaged actively by interpreting proverbs through symbolic metaphor. Some groups were identified using metaphorical representation in their short drama to deepen the interpretation of the proverb. To illustrate, group 4 dramatises the proverb “water can carve through stone” as persistence. This meaning was conveyed in a memorable way by picturing how students overcome difficulties in learning (represented by stone) by putting continuous effort (represented by water). The use of this symbolic metaphor was recognized by the students as they stated in their reflection. “Teacher’s comparison of water carving through stone clearly illustrates that even small, steady effort can make a big difference over time.” (R, G4)

Their reflection shows that they did not only understand the proverb's meaning but also, they consciously applied metaphor to convey meaning. This demonstrates a sophisticated understanding of how conceptual metaphors function as cognitive tools, allowing for deeper engagement and practical application of idiomatic expressions beyond a more lexical recognition (Hang, 2024; Mustafa et al., 2023). Besides, it also confirmed that students engaged thoughtfully with symbolic meaning.

Third, students engaged actively by interpreting proverbs through contextually relevant scenarios. It means that the students demonstrated creativity by situating the proverbs within relatable, real-life contexts they commonly experience as in navigating social media, handling academic pressure, or managing interpersonal dynamics with peers. For example, the proverb “Don’t bite a hand that feeds you” from group 6 used school context to present a story about betrayal and forgiveness. By using familiar context, they were able to connect with the audience more effectively and conveyed the moral lesson in a meaningful engaging way.

4.1.3. Communication

Students’ engagement in proverb dramatization emerged as a multimodal process of meaning-making rather than mere verbal participation. Drawing on Kress and Van Leeuwen’s (2001) social semiotic framework, communication can be understood as the articulation and interpretation of meaning across multiple semiotic strata: discourse design, production, and distribution. Discourse refers to socially constructed knowledge; design concerns the selection and orchestration of semiotic resources; production involves the material realization of meaning through voice, gesture, and movement; and distribution relates to how semiotic products circulate and reach audiences.

In the context of proverb dramatization, communication engagement primarily unfolded across the discourse, design, production continuum, while distribution was limited to in class performance before peers as an interpretive community. At discourse level engagement, communication involves the successful articulation of the proverb’s socially constructed meaning. A group of students stated that they could convey the meaning of the proverb effectively.

Our group successfully conveyed the meaning of the proverb because we stated it explicitly in our story. This made it easy for the audience to understand. Additionally, we used a clear plot and relatable characters to help emphasize the message. By ensuring that the proverb was directly mentioned and demonstrated through actions, we made sure that the audience could grasp the lesson without confusion. (GR, G2)

Another finding from the questionnaire also reveals that the students strongly agreed that they were able to clearly communicate their character’s role and emotion.

Table 5

Communication engagement at the discourse level.

No.	Statements	1	2	3	4	5
1.	I was able to clearly communicate my character’s role and emotions.	0%	0%	29.03%	25.81%	45.16%

It is then indicated that the students were not merely performing scripted lines but were engaging with the interpretive substance of the proverb. At design level engagement, students were found to actively explore different ways of communicating ideas.

Table 6

Communication engagement at the design level.

No.	Statements	1	2	3	4	5
1.	I learned how to express emotions effectively through voice and body language.	0%	0%	12.90%	38.71%	48.39%
2.	The performance allowed me to explore different ways of communicating ideas.	0%	3.23%	12.90%	45.16%	38.71%

The majority of students stated that they learned how to express their emotions effectively through voice and body language. This suggests that proverb dramatization activity required them to be aware of how facial expression, posture, and movement enhance meaning, emotion, and character portrayal.

According to Kress and van Leeuwen (2001), design functions as the conceptual bridge between discourse and production. In this study, students did not rely solely on verbal dialogue but deliberately selected multimodal strategies to represent meaning. They made choices regarding tone, pacing, spatial positioning, gesture intensity, and facial expression to enhance communicative clarity. One student noted: "Instead of just saying the words, I had to really think about their meaning and how to express them through my actions, expressions, and dialogue" (Q, S2)

This reflects multimodal awareness that students demonstrated sensitivity to how meaning can be shaped through coordinated semiotic modes. Engagement at this level thus reflects creative semiotic decision-making rather than mechanical reproduction of text. At production level engagement, students reported notable improvement in verbal communication skills.

Table 7

Communication engagement at the production level.

No.	Statements	1	2	3	4	5
1.	The activity helped me improve my verbal communication skills.	0%	3.23%	6.45%	45.16%	45.16%
2.	Performing helped me feel more confident in speaking English.	0%	0%	6.45%	54.84%	38.71%
3.	The activity improved my pronunciation, tone, and fluency.	0%	0%	19.35%	41.94%	38.71%

The finding in table 7 reveals that the students demonstrated engagement in terms of communication throughout proverb dramatization. Students' responses suggested that they experienced notable growth in areas of verbal communication. In verbal communication, many students responded positively to the statement that the proverb dramatization activity improved their pronunciation, tone, and fluency. This finding suggests strong engagement in the material articulation of meaning.

Production, in social semiotic terms, concerns the embodied realization of designed meaning. Through rehearsal and performance, students transformed planned semiotic strategies into enacted communication. Frequent practice, peer feedback, and live performance created conditions for embodied learning. As one student described:

I felt that my pronunciation and speaking flow improved during the activity. Since I had to practice my lines repeatedly, I became more familiar with the correct pronunciation and natural rhythm of speaking. Performing in front of others also encouraged me to speak more clearly and confidently. Additionally, receiving feedback from my group helped me recognize and correct any mistakes. Overall, the continuous practice and real-life use of English led to a noticeable improvement in my speaking skills. (INT, S3)

This indicates that communication engagement extended beyond cognitive understanding to physical enactment. Students became aware of how their vocal quality, rhythm, and bodily presence shaped audience interpretation. In this sense, engagement was experiential and performative.

Overall, it can be said that communication engagement in proverb dramatization was not confined to speaking practice alone. Rather, it involved interpretive understanding, multimodal orchestration, embodied enactment, and audience interaction. This multilayered engagement illustrates how drama-based pedagogy can cultivate communicative competence grounded in social semiotic meaning-making.

4.2. Factors influencing students' engagement

To answer the second research question (QR 2): "What factors influence students' engagement in drama-based learning when interpreting proverbs? The data finding is categorized into engagement enablers, and engagement challenges and negotiation processes. Rather than representing purely positive or negative influences, these factors illustrate the dynamic nature of engagement in collaborative drama-based learning.

4.2.1. Engagement enablers

Students' engagement in dramatizing proverbs was supported by several conditions that acted as engagement enablers during the learning process. The findings indicate that peer support and group dynamics, personal motivation, and opportunities for creative expression contributed to sustaining students' active participation throughout the dramatization activity.

4.2.1.1. Peer support and group dynamic

The presence of strong peer support and positive group dynamic becomes one of the most prominent factors that influence students' engagement in proverbs dramatization. Data from table 8 indicated that the majority of the students worked well in their groups and their ideas were respected. As their ideas were appreciated greatly by the group, they felt comfortable in expressing it. This finding is consistent with Ryan and Deci's self-determination theory which highlights the role of relatedness and autonomy in promoting intrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2020). When learners experience a sense of belonging and feel that their perspectives are acknowledged, they are more likely to engage actively and communicate openly with their peers. In this study, students' sense of emotional safety within their groups appeared to encourage them to participate more confidently in creative discussions and rehearsal activities.

Table 8

Peer support and group dynamic.

No.	Statements	1	2	3	4	5
1.	My group worked well together and respected each other's ideas	0%	0%	0%	25.81%	80.65%
2.	The rehearsal process improved our teamwork and problem-solving skills.	0%	0%	9.68%	35.48%	54.84%
3.	I felt comfortable expressing my ideas to the group.	0%	0%	16.13%	9.68%	70.97%

To support the finding in table 8, group 3 performance was examined. Students in this group portrayed a balanced collaboration, where each member actively contributed to the development of the performance. Responsibilities were shared among members, and their reflection explicitly emphasized the importance of cooperation, stating that "to perform and act well, teamwork is needed," (GR, G3). This example highlights how supportive group dynamics enabled students to work collectively toward a shared performance goal.

4.2.1.2. Personal motivation

In addition to peer support and group dynamic, personal motivation also functioned as an important engagement enabler during the dramatization process. Several students noted that the activity of proverbs dramatization encouraged them to think more deeply and creatively.

Table 9

Personal motivation.

No.	Statements	1	2	3	4	5
1.	The activity encouraged me to think creatively in interpreting the proverb.	0%	0%	13.35%	22.58%	58.06%

Personal motivation can be increased by positive emotional response. Personal motivation also emerged as a driving factor in sustaining engagement. Students who found the task enjoyable and meaningful reported a stronger commitment to rehearsal and performance. Emotionally positive learning experiences are associated with higher engagement and retention (Dörnyei, 2001; Pekrun et al., 2007).

Many students described feelings of enjoyment and excitement during the activity which increased their willingness to participate. For example, one student stated: “*It was fun. We also got entertained by other groups who performed*” (INT, S3), another student shared a similar sentiment: “I felt great and found the drama activity interesting because I could experience what it’s like to be someone else’s characters. I think I want to do short dramas like this because it was so fun.” (INT, S15)

The statements from the students indicated that the proverb dramatization activity was not only educational but also emotionally rewarding. The enjoyment experienced during the activity appeared to strengthen their motivation to participate actively. One student also reported experiencing mixed emotions, combining excitement with nervousness:

I felt both excited and nervous about participating in the drama activity. It was exciting because it allowed me to express myself creatively and work closely with my group, but at the same time, I felt a bit anxious about performing in front of others. Despite the challenges, I found it to be a fun and meaningful learning experience. (INT, S27)

The expression of excitement and creativity mentioned by the student (S27) showed a high level of intrinsic motivation. Despite the emotional tension she had, she was able to overcome nervousness and engage in the activity meaningfully.

4.2.1.3. Creative freedom

Another factor that enabled students’ engagement was the opportunity to exercise creative freedom throughout the dramatization process. Many students reported that they felt free to express their creativity in different aspects of the performance, including acting, scriptwriting, and staging. By letting the students interpret proverbs in their own ways, the activity encouraged them to take ownership of the learning process. Students were able to develop their characters, construct storylines, and organize the visual and spatial elements of the performance. These opportunities enabled them to explore their imaginative interpretation and while actively engaging with the moral meanings embedded in the proverbs.

Table 10

Creative freedom.

No.	Statements	1	2	3	4	5
1.	I felt free to express my creativity in acting, scriptwriting, or staging.	0%	0%	22.58%	45.16%	32.26%

2.	Watching other groups' performances inspired new creative ideas for me.	0%	0%	16.3%	35.48%	48.38%
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The findings also show that observing other groups' performances served as a source of inspiration for many students. Watching their peers perform allowed students to reflect on different ways of presenting ideas and encouraged them to experiment with new creative approaches. This process not only stimulated imagination but also deepened their engagement with the dramatization activity as a whole.

Finally, while these conditions supported students' engagement during the dramatization activity, the learning process also involved several challenges that required students to negotiate roles, ideas, and performance strategies. These challenges are discussed in the following section.

4.2.2. Engagement challenges and negotiation processes

While several factors supported students' engagement in proverb dramatization, the process was not without difficulties. Rather than simply limiting participation, these challenges reveal the dynamic nature of engagement in drama-based learning. Students encountered tensions related to collaboration, creativity, and communication that required them to negotiate roles, refine ideas, and adjust performance strategies. These experiences illustrate that engagement was not always smooth but involved active problem-solving and persistence.

4.2.2.1. Challenges in collaboration

Understanding the challenges students faced while working in teams provides valuable insight into how collaborative engagement developed during the dramatization process. Based on the students' reflection, two main issues emerged: scheduling and time management constraint, and uneven participation among group members. "Most of us were busy with other activities, so we couldn't rehearse much when preparing for the performance". (SR, S2)

Drama-based learning requires coordinated participation because each member contributes to the continuity of scenes, dialogue flow, and stage movement. Therefore, limited rehearsal time created pressure on groups to organize their preparation efficiently. However, rather than preventing engagement entirely, these constraints often encouraged students to divide tasks, rehearse selectively, or make strategic decisions about how to simplify scenes. In this sense, time constraint prompted groups to negotiate responsibilities and prioritize essential aspects of the performance. "One of my group members only did half of his task, and in the end another member helped me finish it." (SR, S6)

Uneven participation sometimes required other members to assume additional responsibilities. Although this situation generated frustration, it also prompted groups to reorganize their workflow and redistribute tasks to maintain progress. Such adjustments demonstrate that collaborative engagement involves negotiation and role flexibility rather than equal participation at all times. Previous studies note that group-based learning frequently involves shifts in participation patterns as students adapt to different commitment levels

(Jaleniauskiene et al., 2019). In the context of this study, students' effort to manage these difficulties suggest that engagement was sustained through collaborative problem-solving.

4.2.2.2. *Challenges in creativity*

In the creativity aspect of the dramatization process, the students also experienced challenges. These challenges relate to developing ideas, building scripts, interpreting proverbs, and turning concepts into engaging performances.

One of the challenges was transforming the abstract meaning of a proverb into a short dramatic narrative. One student explained that his group needed to balance clarity and brevity while ensuring that the moral message remained understandable. "In making the short performance, we had to make it short but to the point. We had several challenges in writing the script and deciding how to make it brief and clear." (SR, S1)

Other groups encountered difficulty choosing which proverb to dramatize or deciding how to interpret it creatively. "While working with the group we faced difficulty in choosing the proverb to be talked about in the performance" (SR, S8). One student also described disagreement about storyline development. "I argued about our story because it looked too classic or monotonous." (SR, S9)

Although these issues slowed the creative process, they also indicate that students were actively evaluating the effectiveness of their ideas. Negotiating different interpretations and revise their scripts accordingly. In this sense, creativity tension functioned as a productive dimension of engagement rather than a purely negative experience. They need to reconcile differing ideas and encourage deep reflection on how abstract moral messages could be represented through narrative performance.

4.2.2.3. *Challenges in communication*

Communication-related challenges mainly involved expressive performance and emotional delivery. Some students found it difficult to convey intended emotion through facial expressions, tone, or body language. For instance, one student described difficulty expressing frustration convincingly during a scene: "The main challenge was showing the expression. I acted as a grumpy friend that wanted to finish the project quickly. I tried to show some frustrated smile as the project did not finish quickly, but it ended up looking like a happy smile." (SR, S13) Another student emphasized the difficulty of maintaining appropriate tone and character interaction: "We also need to work on expressing the right emotions, tone, and understanding our characters, especially in important scenes." (SR, S12)

These experiences highlight the complexity of embodied communication in drama-based learning. Unlike conventional classroom speaking activities, dramatization requires coordination between verbal delivery and physical expression. Students therefore needed to develop awareness of how voice projection, facial expression, and body movement contribute to meaning-making.

Some of these difficulties may also relate to language anxiety, which can influence students' confidence during public performance (Horwitz et al., 1986). Nevertheless, the

reflections suggest that such challenges motivated repeated rehearsal and closer attention to expressive detail. Through practice and feedback, students gradually refined their ability to align emotional intention with physical performance.

5. Conclusion

This study examined how students engage in proverbs dramatization activities in terms of collaboration, creativity, and communication, as well as the factors that influence their engagement throughout the learning process. With respect to collaboration, student engagement was reflected in teamwork and mutual support throughout the dramatization process. Many students demonstrated patience, flexibility, and active participation while working with peers to plan and rehearse their performances. Regarding creativity, students exhibited creative capacity through the development of unique storylines and symbolic metaphors. Rather than reproducing proverbs literally, students interpreted them via contextually relevant situations, thereby enabling the construction of meaningful narratives that conveyed the intended moral messages. In terms of communication, students' communicative competence was manifested through both verbal and non-verbal channels. They endeavored to convey the meaning of proverbs not only through clear pronunciation and intonation but also through body language and facial expressions.

Student engagement was shaped by a combination of engagement enablers and engagement challenges. Engagement was supported by factors such as peer support, personal motivation, and opportunities for creative expression, all of which encouraged students to participate actively in the dramatization process. Concurrently, students encountered several challenges pertaining to collaboration, creativity, and communication, including time constraints, difficulties in coordinating group work, and challenges associated with developing original scenarios. Importantly, these challenges did not merely hinder participation. Rather, they became integral to the learning process as students negotiated roles, revised ideas, and worked collaboratively to complete their performances. Ultimately, the study suggests that dramatizing proverbs can provide a meaningful learning experience that promotes collaborative interaction, creative interpretation, and multimodal communication within the EFL classroom.

Declaration on the use of AI

The authors employed Grammarly, an artificial intelligence-based writing assistance tool, to enhance the linguistic clarity of the manuscript and to verify consistency between in-text citations and the reference list. The final content was subsequently reviewed and edited by the authors, who assume full responsibility for the accuracy and integrity of the work.

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