

Theatrical Play Implementation to Provide Authentic Learning Experience

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Abstract: This study aimed to find (i) how theatrical play was implemented in SMPN 1 Lewolema East Flores, and (ii) how it facilitated authentic language learning. This is qualitative case study involving the students and a teacher of SMPN 1 Lewolema East Flores. Field notes, a video recorder, a teaching journal, and an interview were used to collect the data. The finding showed that (i) theatrical play in the form of short movie production was well implemented by using its teaching syntax; pre-production, production, and post-production. Furthermore, (ii) it could promote authentic language learning based on elements of authentic learning situation; (1) real world relevance, (2) ill-defined nature of the learning task, (3) incorporation into the activity of several complex tasks, (4) opportunity to collaborate, (5) assessment which was seamlessly integrated with the task, (6) polished product outcome activity, and (7) possible diversity of outcomes. Theatrical play also facilitated four language skills within varied activities. This study suggests to conducting an experimental study to see the effectiveness of theatrical play in language learning.

Keywords: Authentic Learning; Implementation; Language Skills; Qualitative Case Study; Theatrical Play.

1. INTRODUCTION

A number of scholars have attempted to identify particular components and dimensions of authenticity in order to deepen the understanding of authentic learning environments and to inform their effective design (Filimonova & Mazhitayeva, 2023). Gaining insight into students' early experiences and perceptions of authenticity during their initial exposure to authentic learning is essential. Such understanding provides a foundation for designing learning activities that gradually increase in authenticity and complexity as students advance through their academic programs (Ratnasari et al., 2023).

Within the International Education Program (IEP), authentic learning is primarily implemented through problem-based learning (PBL) and project-based learning approaches. However, research on authenticity and PBL has largely developed independently, with limited theoretical and practical integration. Bridging these two areas is crucial to offering students a coherent developmental pathway through active and situated learning, thereby transforming learning experiences into meaningful and transformative processes of exploration and personal growth (Khuluq et al., 2023).

This paper seeks to connect these two strands of scholarship by analyzing empirical data and proposing practical strategies for systematically embedding authentic learning elements into PBL activities, particularly project-based learning. Addressing an existing research gap, this study examines a student project at SMPN 1 Lewolema, East Flores, in which learners produced a short movie using mixed languages Indonesian and a local language. Due

to limited video-recording facilities, students relied on smartphones for filming and editing. Through this project, the study explored both the implementation of theatrical play and its role in creating authentic learning experiences. Theatrical play has long been utilized by language educators as an effective means of supporting language acquisition and skill development (Kartikasari et al., 2023). It has been implemented to enhance authenticity in both learning experiences and language use (Bella & Evaggelinou, 2018). To investigate the implementation of theatrical techniques, their contribution to language learning, and the integration of language skills, students were actively engaged in creating and producing their own short videos.

Theatrical practices such as role-play, drama production, improvisation, and short performances based on folktales or fairy tales are commonly found in language classrooms (Kultsum & Arsadani, 2014). This prevalence can be attributed to the shared emphasis on communication in both theatre and language learning. Educational role-play enables the integration of instructional content and learning objectives within narrative contexts. The characters or agents involved must not only appear authentic and believable but also reflect pedagogical principles and educational aims (Sudrajad, 2023).

Despite the widespread use of theatrical activities, language instruction has traditionally focused on students performing pre-written scripts in the target language. Encouraging learners to write their own scripts and produce original videos introduces a constructivist approach to instruction, which is associated with more advanced pedagogical practices. One of the central principles of constructivism is the emphasis on authentic learning experiences (Wibowo & Fitriany, 2025).

In language education, the importance of authenticity is well established. Communicative language teaching, as the dominant instructional approach, emphasizes the use of real-life language in classroom contexts. To facilitate genuine language use, learning activities must reflect authentic communicative situations, as real-world language always occurs within a meaningful context (Sudrajad, 2024).

The advantages of incorporating drama into language learning are extensive. Previous studies indicate that participation in drama activities enhances analytical thinking and creativity (Brauer, 2002; Joronen et al., 2008), encourages learner autonomy and responsibility (Brauer, 2002), and introduces diverse learning dimensions that are rarely achieved through conventional classroom practices. One particularly significant dimension is the ability of drama-based activities to foster authentic learning environments. Advances in digital technology have further expanded the scope of theatrical activities in language education. Engaging students in the production of digital videos offers a powerful means of encouraging

authentic communication in the target language (Juhairi & Sudrajad, 2022), improving vocabulary retention (Wapa et al., 2024), promoting higher-order thinking, and developing multiple forms of literacy.(Marull & Kumar, 2020; Paradowska, 2021)identify ten key indicators of authentic learning: (1) relevance to real-world contexts, (2) open-ended and ill-structured tasks, (3) engagement in complex activities over an extended period, (4) opportunities to approach tasks from multiple perspectives, (5) collaboration among learners, (6) opportunities for reflection, (7) interdisciplinary integration, (8) assessment embedded within learning activities, (9) the production of refined and meaningful outcomes, and (10) the potential for diverse learning products.

Previous research has demonstrated that theatre, as an educational medium incorporating entertainment and humor, effectively captures students' attention (Marull & Kumar, 2020)and supports learning through the interaction between real and fictional contexts. Theatre in Education (TIE) has emerged as an innovative strategy for engaging young learners in discussions related to health, social issues, and well-being. Evaluative studies indicate that most students respond positively to educational theatre, displaying high levels of engagement, attentiveness, and the ability to comprehend key educational messages conveyed through performances(Fryer & Leenknecht, 2023; Hattie et al., 2020; Syahidi et al., 2023; Xu et al., 2023).

Based on these considerations, theatrical play has become an important pedagogical tool in language education, contributing significantly to language development and skill acquisition. Through theatrical engagement, learners are immersed in authentic contexts that mirror real-life language use while simultaneously fostering creativity. Nevertheless, despite the demonstrated effectiveness of drama-based instruction, limited attention has been given to the integration of everyday technologies, such as smartphones, into classroom practice. In particular, the potential of student-generated video projects as a medium for theatrical expression remains underexplored in the Indonesian language learning context. Incorporating such technology offers a promising avenue for increasing student engagement, deepening learning experiences, and simultaneously developing digital literacy skills (Mishra, 2020).

2. METHOD

This research employed a descriptive design aimed at portraying an educational intervention and the real-life context in which it took place. A qualitative case study approach was adopted to enable an in-depth examination of a particular phenomenon within its natural setting through the use of multiple sources of evidence. Utilizing diverse data sources allowed

the phenomenon to be examined from different perspectives, thereby revealing its various dimensions and enhancing the depth of understanding (Weyant, 2022). Data collection methods included classroom observation, documentation, and interviews. Observational data were gathered through systematic field notes and video recordings of teaching and learning activities. Documentation involved the analysis of the teacher's instructional journal to capture the teaching process over time. Interviews were conducted to obtain both teachers' and students' perspectives on the use of theatrical play in video production.

To investigate the implementation of theatrical techniques at SMPN 1 Lewolema and their role in fostering authentic language learning, observational data and teaching documentation served as the primary sources of evidence. Interviews were used to complement and enrich the findings by incorporating students' viewpoints. Classroom observations were carried out over a three-month period to examine the teaching practices involving theatrical play. Additionally, instructional documentation covering half of the semester was analyzed, while interviews with the teacher and students were conducted during the post-production stage of the project.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This study was conducted with two primary objectives: first, to investigate the implementation of theatrical play within the teaching and learning process, and second, to examine how such activities supported authentic learning experiences. Prior to initiating the short video project, careful instructional planning was undertaken to ensure that learning objectives could be effectively achieved. Interview data revealed that the teacher independently designed and adapted the syllabus by drawing on personal creativity and professional judgment.

Implementation of Theatrical Play through Short Video Production

The process of producing a short film follows a systematic sequence consisting of three main stages: pre-production, production, and post-production. Each stage plays a vital role in the overall process, with team members carrying out specific tasks based on clearly assigned roles and responsibilities.

The pre-production stage functions as the planning foundation of the project. During this phase, students engaged in script writing, role assignment, location selection, scheduling, and preparation of necessary resources. These preparatory activities are critical, as decisions made at this stage shape the direction of the project and influence the effectiveness of subsequent production activities. Upon completing the planning stage, the project proceeded

to the production phase, where filming activities were carried out. This phase involved organizing scenes, coordinating performers, and arranging technical elements such as lighting, camera positioning, and sound recording. Strong communication and teamwork were essential to ensure that the creative ideas developed during planning were successfully realized during filming.

The final stage, post-production, focused on refining the recorded materials into a complete and coherent short film. Activities during this phase included video editing, sound mixing, the addition of visual effects, and color adjustment. Particular attention was given to balancing dialogue, music, and background sound to enhance the overall quality of the film. Collaborative efforts during post-production were crucial, as they transformed raw footage into a polished final product suitable for presentation and viewing (Noercahyo & Maulana, 2019).

Table 1. The Implementation of Theatrical Play.

Picture	Description
	Students had the experience in producing short movie '<i>Petuah Petualang</i>' in the last semester. The difference is, previous movie used Bahasa for the whole script. After got some suggestions from the viewer to sustain the local language, the current project mixed the languages.
	Pre-Production ✓ Writing small group script ✓ Writing class project script of short video ✓ Reading the scripts ✓ Script revision and correction



Pre-Production

- ✓ Casting
- ✓ Interaction with other characters on the play
- ✓ Rehearsals in general



Pre-Production

- ✓ Voice and vocal exercises
- ✓ Improvisation exercises in group
- ✓ Rehearsals



Production

- ✓ Making the sets
- ✓ Organizing the players
- ✓ Taking video



Post-Production

Adapting and recording the video

Editing and finishing

Released on 21 November 2024

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y7Oqk8hYZfo>

Authentic Learning Experiences through Theatrical Play

The syllabus developed for the short video production project was aligned with the instructional stages proposed by (Girón-García & Fortanet-Gómez, 2023), which include introductory ice-breaking activities, warm-up exercises, tasks addressing conflict resolution

and power relations, issue-based exploration, and project evaluation through performance (Camilleri & Camilleri, 2022). Findings from classroom observations and interviews with both the teacher and students indicate that the use of theatrical techniques effectively supported students' authentic language learning.

Of the ten characteristics of authentic learning environments identified by (Marull & Kumar, 2020), seven were evident in this study: (1) relevance to real-life contexts, (2) the presence of open-ended and ill-structured tasks, (3) engagement in multiple complex activities requiring sustained effort over time, (4) opportunities for collaborative work, (5) assessment processes that were naturally embedded within the learning activities, (6) the production of refined and meaningful outputs, and (7) the potential for varied learning outcomes.

The findings of this study are consistent with (Boonsong & Meesup, 2020) research, which emphasizes that theatrical activities are commonly employed by language educators to enhance and support language learning. Nikitina further argues that engaging learners in creating their own videos or short films in the target language enables an integrated learning experience that combines language development, artistic expression, and elements of popular culture. Such activities contribute to the creation of authentic learning environments in which real-world contexts are embedded in the educational process, thereby encouraging learners to use language in meaningful and realistic ways.

Additionally, (Kartikasari et al., 2023) highlights that theatrical principles particularly those drawn from improvisational theatre and meta-theatre can inform the design of educational practices and learning agents. These concepts provide a framework for structuring drama- and video-based projects that promote authenticity in language learning. The following section elaborates on each element of authentic learning as manifested in the drama and video production project.

Table 2. Elements of Authentic Learning in Theatrical Play.

Element of Authentic Learning	Description	Elaboration in the Video Project
Real-world relevance	The language used in the video mirrors everyday communication.	The storylines reflected real-life situations familiar to students, such as interactions between parents and children, friendships, community members, and couples. These scenarios required learners to use language as it naturally occurs in daily contexts.
Ill-defined nature of the task	The project did not rely on pre-prepared instructional materials or rigid guidelines.	Students were required to break the project into manageable phases and independently plan each stage. During production, they faced unforeseen challenges, including technical issues and software limitations, which required problem-solving and adaptability.

Integration of multiple complex tasks	The project demanded the coordination of linguistic, creative, and technical skills.	Learners wrote scripts and dialogues, memorized lines, managed filming schedules, prepared equipment and props, and selected appropriate locations, demonstrating engagement in multifaceted and sustained tasks.
Opportunities for collaboration	Responsibilities were shared among group members.	Each team member actively contributed to story development, dialogue writing, filming, and editing. In drama preparation, students collaborated on rehearsals, stage settings, audio arrangements, and costume selection, fostering teamwork and cooperative learning.
Assessment integrated into learning	Evaluation was embedded within the project process.	Assessment criteria were communicated before the project began and included language accuracy, content quality, creativity, and teamwork, allowing students to align their performance with expected outcomes throughout the project.
Production of a polished outcome	The project resulted in a well-prepared final product.	Filming commenced only after scripts were completed and thoroughly rehearsed. Students carefully considered the messages they intended to convey and how to present them effectively to their audience.
Diversity of learning outcomes	Both linguistic and non-linguistic skills were developed.	In addition to improving language proficiency, students enhanced soft skills such as collaboration, communication, perseverance, time management, and responsibility. Some students also reported gaining new insights into performing arts and cooperative learning practices.

The process of producing and recording a video is inherently complex and time-intensive, involving multiple interconnected stages that culminate in a refined final product. Throughout this process, students are provided with numerous opportunities to collaborate, reflect on their learning experiences, and engage with the project from different viewpoints. Completing such a task requires learners to manage a range of responsibilities, including scriptwriting, prop preparation, acting, and the selection of suitable filming locations. This multifaceted engagement encourages students to develop a strong sense of ownership over their learning process.

Evidence gathered from students' performing arts activities indicates that the dialogues embedded in the video scripts reflected authentic, real-life communication. As noted by (Sudrajad, 2025) everyday expressions commonly used in drama such as agreeing, disagreeing, congratulating, expressing disappointment, arguing, showing surprise, conveying sympathy, and giving thanks were evident in the students' performances. Several scenes depicted familiar social contexts, including interactions between parents and children, teachers and students, friends, and couples, further reinforcing the real-world relevance of the language used.

During the development of storylines and the planning of video production, students were given ample opportunities to reflect not only on the language content they had learned but also on how to produce a high-quality final product, which is recognized as a key indicator of authentic learning. Additionally, learners were required to approach the task from multiple angles. They needed to balance creative considerations related to drama performance and video production with practical concerns such as time management and resource allocation. For

instance, drama groups were responsible for organizing rehearsal schedules, arranging costumes, and preparing stage settings. Meanwhile, video production teams had to revise their initial plans such as filming in distant locations after realizing that these plans would demand substantial financial resources and extended time commitments.

A central component of the project was the students' ability to communicate intended messages clearly to their audience through appropriate language use. Effective communication was achieved only when viewers were able to understand the message conveyed. To support this goal, two main conditions guided language use in the project: first, students were permitted to adapt well-known stories or create original narratives that conveyed positive moral values; second, all narratives and dialogues had to be comprehensible to the intended audience. As commonly observed in language education, students often experience limitations when expressing ideas, even in their first language, making this task particularly challenging yet valuable.

Despite these strengths, three essential elements of authentic learning were not fully realized in the theatrical activities. First, opportunities for learners to explore the task from diverse perspectives were limited, as exploration largely remained within students' own viewpoints and primarily emphasized local language contexts. This constraint restricted broader interpretive engagement. Second, interdisciplinary integration was largely absent. At the junior high school level, cross-subject collaboration is often difficult to implement, particularly due to assessment practices that prioritize subject-specific grading. The school's emphasis on academic scores can discourage the integration of projects that span multiple disciplines. Finally, opportunities for structured reflection were insufficient. Time constraints limited the inclusion of reflective activities that would have enabled students to critically examine their learning experiences and outcomes. Such reflection is essential for deepening understanding and supporting learners' personal and academic development.

4. CONCLUSION

Engaging language learners in the creation of projects using the target language offers a wide range of pedagogical benefits. One of the key advantages identified in this study is the enhancement of learning authenticity, which encourages students to use language in ways that closely resemble real-life communication. The findings demonstrate that theatrical play was effectively integrated into the instructional process through three main stages: pre-production, production, and post-production.

The implementation of theatrical play contributed significantly to authentic language learning by embedding several characteristics of real-world learning environments. These included relevance to everyday contexts, open-ended and ill-structured tasks, the integration of multiple complex activities, opportunities for collaborative work, assessment practices that were naturally embedded within the learning process, the creation of refined and meaningful final products, and the potential for diverse learning outcomes.

Based on these findings, this study recommends the development of experimental research to further examine the effectiveness of theatrical play in promoting authentic language learning. It is anticipated that the pedagogical approach outlined in this study may offer valuable insights and alternative strategies for improving language teaching practices in school settings.

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